BLUE BOOK

Magazine of Adventure for MEN, by MEN ★ JUNE ★ 25 Cents

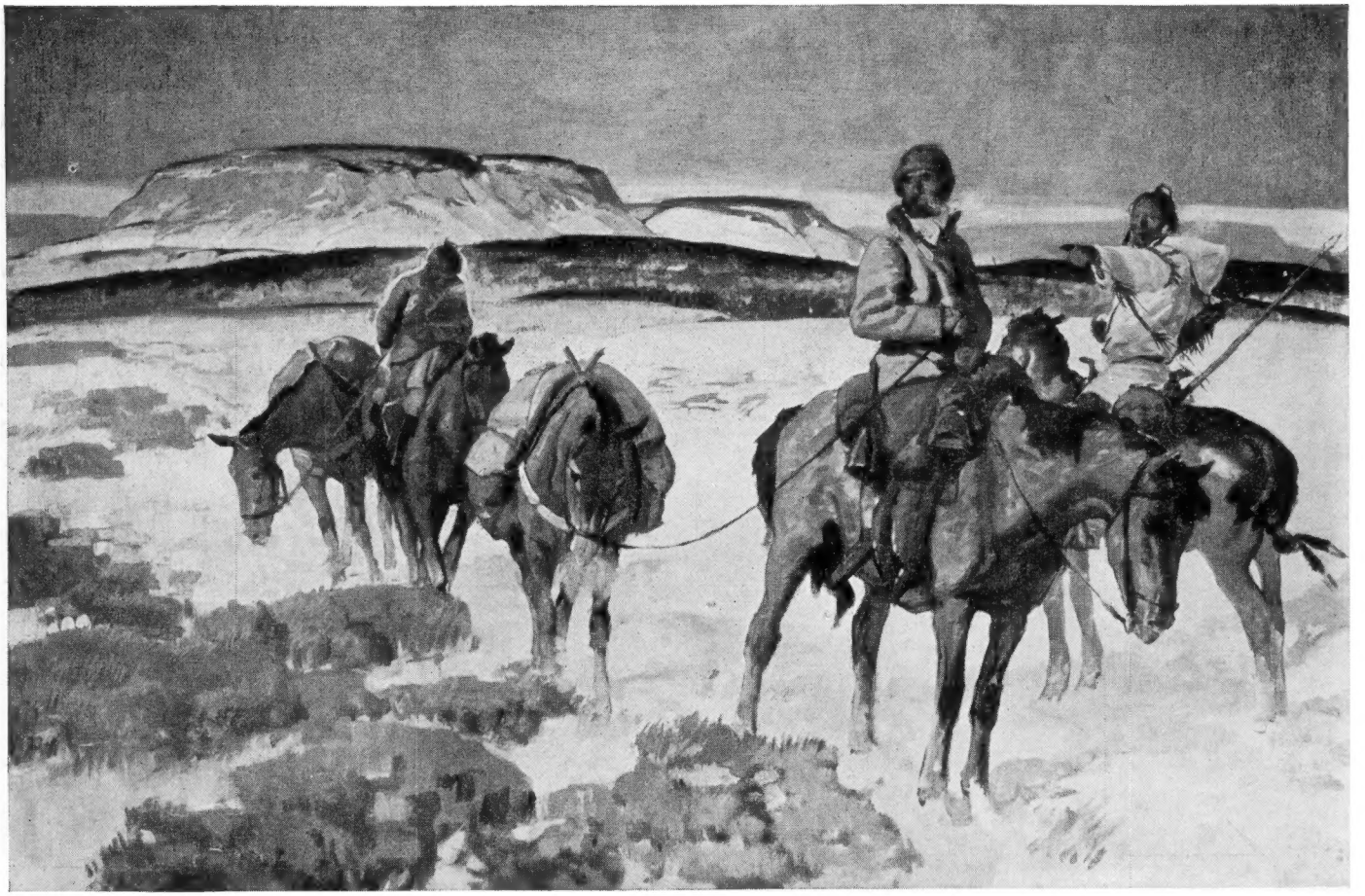
THESE UNITED STATES...VI—Oregon
Painted by HERBERT MORTON STOOPS

Two Short Complete Novels

CANTEEN SEVEN
An adventure in the Sahara today
by ROBERT CARSE

THE WAY OF DARKNESS
Exploring a great cave for atom bomb shelter, they find murder
by GEORGE ARMIN SHAFTEL

Many Short Stories and Special Features



THESE UNITED STATES . . . . VI—OREGON

A Fool in Magnificent Company

A letter in the spirit of Marcus Whitman

"THERE is the pass," said my Indian guide. In that blinding snowstorm it looked like nothing. I was afraid; I had a feeling that the whole road was wrong. To cross the unknown Rockies in winter was madness, but I had to do it, to prevent my missionary board from giving up the Oregon work. I knew what a great land it was, and they did not.

Yes, I was afraid, till I recalled that this was no personal errand of mine, but one of faith; therefore if I now lacked faith, it would be lacking in my work and my results. I was bringing Christianity to an unknown land, and my insecurity was great. So in my heart I said this:

"If I be weak where I should be strong, it is my wrong, my lack. Dear Lord, give me what I need so greatly—the faith I purpose to teach!"

Then I felt heartened and strengthened; and after this I never lacked.

I write this with a purpose. It is my firm idea that this land is a destined opportunity to spread the Gospel; and further, in what you would no doubt term a more practical way, that it is my peculiar destiny to begin a flow of people hither. A huge tide of western emigration is just beginning. Oregon needs these settlers and has much to offer them. With the first emigrants, this was a hope, not a settled purpose. I did my best to encourage the hope, and to help get the country settled.

And further—dare I confess it?—is my belief that this Oregon country, in common with our entire nation, has a future laid, as you might say, in the wildest possible dream—a future not of hands, but of a higher destiny. An extravagant idea? I think not, but based upon sober fact. Our people, if they occupy these lands, can make full use of the vast possibilities here; the Indians cannot. There is an important distinction between us and the red man.

We worship. The Indian believes but worships not. To him, the Great Spirit is one to recognize and respect and fear—no more. And I must say that I can see and appreciate his limited viewpoint. . . . The country is ready for us.

You may say that only a fool would credit such visions of a future planned by a higher destiny. Very well, I accept the term. I am a fool, then, in magnificent company. A far greater man than I once expressed himself as proud of being a fool in Christ.

So, since preaching is my business, permit me to close with a text: "Where there is no vision, the people perish." What does it mean? Well, to me it expresses the awe I have always felt of the Rockies. It is no shame to confess that one sees in the works of God a symbol of what man should aim at spiritually.

Readers' Comment*

High Adventure on Slick Paper!

Since you welcome constructive criticism, here goes: My time for reading is limited, and I prefer fiction in the moments that I can spare. BLUE BOOK *was recommended to me by a friend. I had often taken a copy out of a magazine rack, only to put it back without buying it. The cover attracted me, as no doubt it has attracted countless others. But I imagine that many others did not purchase it for the same reason I didn't. Like myself, they were unfavorably impressed with the newspaper stock composing the body of the magazine.*

But for the urging of a friend, I would have lost many of the pleasures locked in the newsprint pages. Stories of such high standards deserve a better medium. Sir, I'm positive that on slick paper, the magazine would be a natural selection to those who never read it. Or couldn't you at least use 50-50 slick paper and newsprint?

John Krill.

We're Proud of This One:

In March the Indiana State Legislature passed the following resolution:

Be it resolved by the Senate, the House of Representatives concurring:

WHEREAS, the BLUE BOOK Magazine by means of a front and back cover design painted by the distinguished artist, Herbert Morton Stoops, has depicted the capture of Vincennes in 1779 by George Rogers Clark, for its hundreds of thousands of readers throughout the United States; and

WHEREAS, this glorious episode, leading to the establishment of the Wabash River post as the first capital of the great Northwest Territory, is one in which all Indiana finds a thrill of pride: Therefore

Be It Resolved By The Senate Of The General Assembly Of The State Of Indiana, The House Of Representatives Concurring:

That the Eighty-fifth General Assembly does hereby express to Donald Kennicott, editor of BLUE BOOK Magazine and Herbert Morton Stoops, the artist, Indiana's appreciation and gratitude for this fine mark of historical distinction accorded our pioneer forefathers.

*The Editors of BLUE BOOK are glad to receive letters of constructive criticism and suggestions; and for the ones we publish each month we will pay the writers ten dollars each.

Letters should not be longer than two hundred words; no letters can be returned and all will become property of McCall Corporation. They should be addressed: Editor of Letters Blue Book Magazine, 230 Park Ave., New York 17, New York.

BLUE BOOK

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Painted by Herbert Morton Stoops

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Except for articles and stories of Real Experience, all stories and novels printed herein are fiction and are intended as such. They do not refer to real characters or to actual events. If the name of any living person is used, it is a coincidence

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Weep No More,

THEY crossed the wide, muddy Arkansas River in late afternoon, and bedded two thousand longhorns on the flats beyond the north bank; then they turned their faces toward Dodge City, five miles to the east, every man of them. This was what they had waited for; this was trail's end; and across all the thundering miles up out of Texas and through the Indian Nations and into Kansas, on days of dust and nights of storm, through monotony and weariness and heat and danger, they had talked of this. They stepped up into saddles when the work was done, all but those who'd volunteered to hold the herd; and they came to Dodge in the time-honored manner of Texas trail men, crowding their horses at a high gallop up Second Avenue, and not even reining down in the plaza, where teeming humanity split a path for them, and glassed-in kerosene lamps spread their brilliance.

Sam Travis rode up front—the right of gray hair and twenty years of saddle-whacking for the Twin-T; and Deef Bicknell rode at his one hand and Sid Kendrick at the other; and the rest of the crew, five of them, were strung out behind, with Jody McClain eating the dust, just as he'd done all the miles out of Texas. Jody was as bug-eyed as any pilgrim tonight. They'd told him that Dodge was a hell-roaring town, but Jody hadn't supposed you could actually hear it roar. Yet there was a low, muttering tone to it, incessant and passively ominous, and it made Jody's spine tingle. They didn't have anything like this in the Ohio farm country, where he'd been reared; nor in the Texas Panhandle where'd he'd gone to be a cowboy. It was wine in your blood to be eighteen and trail-weary and seeing Dodge City for the first time. It made you forget that you were still being weighed in a balance, and might be found wanting.

The Old Man had come on ahead, taking the wagon across the toll bridge; and he was waiting for them at the Wright House. When they put up their horses at a hitchrail and trooped into the hotel, he was there, freshly barbered but looking no less grim than always, a big block of a man, eagle-beaked and lion-maned. It soured the wine of excitement in Jody, just seeing him. They said in Texas that Flint Maxwell had drunk the juice of the cactus and cut his teeth on a branding iron, and that he had no heart in him; but they also said that the Old Man asked no hand to do a chore that he himself would shirk.

She drew in a long, hard breath; her voice trembled. "Jody,"

He gave his crew an unsmiling look and opened his iron cash-box. "You've all got wages coming," he said. "You'll want to draw some tonight. Just remember we may be loading those longhorns onto stock-cars tomorrow if I find our cattle-buyer this evening, so leave a drop or two in the saloons. . . . Sam—"

Sam Travis wanted sixty dollars, and there wasn't a one of them but knew how he would spend it; for each man has his weakness, and Sam's was cards. They got their money, one by one, and Jody was last; and when he stood before the Old Man his thought was: *This is it. Now he'll tell me whether he's keeping me on or not.*

The Old Man looked at him as thoughtfully as he might have eyed a steer that needed to be cut into the culls, and Jody was conscious of his clothes, worn threadbare by the trail, and of his body, too lean for the length of it, knowing that he must look altogether gawky and inept. The Old

My Lady!

Any real man has it in him to be a grand fool just once in his life.

by NORMAN A. FOX

she said, "there's a cattle train headed east at midnight."

Man dropped his eyes to his tally-book. "You've got three months' pay coming, McClain," he said. "How much of it do you want?"

Jody said, "Fifty dollars," wondering if his breathlessness told in his words; and then the high giddiness went out of this moment with a sobering thought: *He isn't paying me off in full, but that doesn't prove he's keeping me. He needs me tomorrow for the loading, that's all. Probably he'll hand me my walking papers then.*

The Old Man counted out the money, then fished in his vest for a small envelope. "This is for you too, McClain," he said. "The desk-clerk gave it to me when I first came in. A message from a friend of yours, he said."

Jody took the envelope and saw his name upon it, and was conscious of the stares of all of them. There was a smell of perfume about the envelope, and the handwriting was feminine, and that could let a man in for a great deal of hoorawing. He tore the envelope open, took out a note which said:

I hope you remember me. George Henderson who used to run the mercantile back home was in Dodge awhile ago, and your name happened to come up, and he told me that your folks had said you were working for the Twin-T in Texas. The word was going around this afternoon that Twin-T was hitting town. I'd like very much to see you. Could you meet me in front of the Opera House at ten?

The name *Crystal Alva* was signed to it, and Jody remembered only because it was such an odd name and apt to stick with a man; but even then it took a moment to conjure up a picture, and that picture was misty and dim, and he himself was in it, small and brown and bare-footed and linsey-clad, and she was there too, calico and legs and pigtails, and he was carrying her schoolbooks and making enthusiastic talk of a frog he had captured.

He tucked the note away and said to all of them: "An old friend from where I used to live."

JODY went with the others, after they'd checked their guns at the hotel according to the law of Dodge. Bunched and noisy, they strode along a plank walk where wooden awnings made a continuous canopy, and water barrels stood spaced intermittently in case of fire. There was just time to get barbered before ten o'clock. Front Street had as many barbershops as it had saloons. Jody got out of a chair ahead of any of the rest, because he didn't need much of a shave, and he gave them a wave and slipped to the street and had no trouble finding the Dodge Opera House because it was three stories, the tallest building in town. Its front was dark tonight, for there was no show; and he stood hesitating, peering, when she moved from the shadows.

She said: "You're Jody?"

She was taller than he'd expected her to be, and these five years since he'd seen Ohio had turned her into a woman; yet simple arithmetic made her no more than eighteen. She wore something dark and shapeless—a cloak, he guessed, and a foofaraw bonnet with a curling white plume atop it. She'd become a looker; you could tell that. But it was her voice that had changed most; it had become brittle, and somehow it scared him. He said, fumblingly: "Howdy, Crystal," and wondered if he was supposed to shake hands. A pause became long and awkward, and he said, with a grow-

ing desperation: "Were my folks well when you left? I haven't been much of a hand at writing."

"It's four years since I was home," she said.

He remembered her own folks then, a futile pair, bowed with much toiling, and defeated constantly by stubborn acres, and he supposed he should ask about them. He said: "Could we go some place where we could talk?"

She drew in a long, hard breath, and her voice trembled and then came with a rush. "Jody," she said, "there's a cattle train heading east at midnight. I could buy caboose passage if I had the money. Likely you think I'm nervy for asking, but could you lend me a hundred dollars? I could send it back to you later, or pay it to your folks. I want to go home, Jody. Ma—Ma's sick."

Just like that.

A COLDNESS gathered in him, nameless and belligerent, for he was facing a stranger who had made an outlandish request. He saw, too, that she was wearing paint and powder, too much of it, and he wondered why she should seem so much older than he, when that wasn't so. He said: "I haven't a hundred dollars, Crystal."

She came closer, pressing against him and putting her hands on his shoulders, so that he smelled the perfume she wore, the same perfume she'd put on the note; he fought against its headiness. She said: "Please, Jody! You could get the money!"

He wanted to slap her, and he couldn't have told why; and oddly he wanted, too, to put his arms around her, the way a man does around anybody who needs comforting. Yet they had never been sweethearts, really, and there was nothing in this mad moment that was made of love. Maybe it was homesickness that had him by the throat; maybe there was a ghost in her face, the ghost of another girl she'd once been; anyhow, the smell of hay was in his nostrils again, and the remembrance of truck-patches and paling fences, and hound dogs, and a frog kept alive in a fruit-jar, made a blur in his mind. He stepped back from her and said gruffly: "Wait here. I'll see if I can get you the money."

He was halfway to the Wright House before he remembered that drawing another fifty dollars might mean that Flint Maxwell would ask him questions; and because there could be no sensible answers to those questions, he turned instead toward the Long Branch Saloon, recalling all the trail talk Sam Travis had made of the place. He came into the biggest room he had ever seen, a noisy, smoke-layered room awash with light from oil chandeliers heavy with dangling cut glass; and he skirted a bar he'd heard was the longest in the world, eying the keno layout and the crowded gaming tables until he found the one where Sam Travis sat with several professional gentlemen of the green cloth. He stood behind Travis silently until a hand was dealt and played, and then he said with careful courtesy: "A minute with you, Sam?"

Travis nodded and forced a way to the bar and ordered drinks; and Jody knew then how it had been with Crystal when she'd made her request, for his own voice trembled when he said: "I'd like the loan of fifty dollars, Sam."

Travis bunched his white, bushy eyebrows and smiled with an old man's wisdom. "That friend of yours, kid, from your old stamping-grounds?"

"A girl I used to know," Jody confessed. "She needs money to go home."

"You could draw it from the Old Man. You've got it earned."

"You don't want to trust me for it, Sam?"

Travis fingered his whisky glass, and he said then: "I've had my eye on you, kid. Lemme see, it was spring when you rode to the Twin-T asking for work, and lookin' like you'd had a hard winter. Flint put you on for this drive north, and said he'd talk about a steady job after that. The Twin-T is a hard outfit, kid, but it pays better than most, and it keeps its men, good times and lean, if they measure up. I ought to know. You want to stay on with the Twin-T, kid?"

"You wouldn't be making a fool out of yourself, kid?"

"I reckon I proved that on the trail."

Travis nodded. "You ate the dust of the drag, and you never kicked. You took the middle watch night after night, the one that busts up a man's sleep. You rustled wood for the coosie without anybody asking you. Yes, kid, I think I savvy how bad you want to be a regular hand. But the trail's one thing, and the town's another. How you behave yourself tonight is gonna count with the Old Man. Mind you, none of us are spying for him. But he'll know. He'll be down at the tracks dickering with the cattle-buyer and mindin' his own

business; but just the same, he'll know every move any of us makes. This is part of your test, kid."

Anger stirring in him, Jody said: "Doesn't a man have any private life when he rides for the Twin-T?"

"Sure," Travis said. "But before he's proved himself, his private life can tell a heap about him. You wouldn't be making a fool out of yourself, kid?"

Jody turned away from the bar. "Thanks for the drink, Sam."

"Just a minute," Travis said, and began peeling bills from a roll. "There's some in Dodge who fancy themselves poker-players who are already sadder and wiser. Here's the fifty, kid. Pay it back when you please. The spiel was free."

Jody took the money and stood staring at it, and then he raised his eyes to Sam's and said again: "Thanks, Sam. I appreciate the spiel as much as the fifty. How's a man to know when he's making a fool of himself?"

"I never learned that," Sam said. . . .

Jody went out to the street, tucking the fifty Sam had given him in beside the fifty he'd drawn. He went hurrying toward the Opera House; and because it came to him that he was hurrying to pass over that money before he changed his mind, he moved all the faster. You could tell yourself she was a girl you had known once, and that made a claim. You could remember that she must have been desperate, to ask for the loan; and you could remember that her mother was sick and needed her; but once suspicion had got an edge to it, you thought of a lot of other things too, and mostly you didn't want to be played for a fool. Not only because of what the Old Man would think if he knew, but because of what you would think of yourself afterward.

But when Jody reached the Opera House, she was gone.

THE man who stood waiting had the frostiest eyes Jody had ever seen; there was about him a cool implacability that was more evident than the badge he wore. But the badge was there, plain to see, which made him a marshal of Dodge, one of that formidable lineage that had included Wyatt Earp and the Mastersons and Mysterious Dave Mather. He said: "Looking for somebody, cowboy?"

"A girl," Jody said. "She was going to wait for me here."

"I sent her along where she belongs," the marshal said. "South of the Santa Fe tracks. I've got no quarrel with the way any woman makes her living, but she's Rolle Durango's woman, and that puts her in a class by herself. We like to see you Texas men have a good time, son, but we wouldn't want you swindled. I'm not asking you what her game was. Just consider yourself lucky, cowboy."

Jody's voice turned brittle. "Where is she?" he asked. "I've got to find her."

Pity took the frost out of the marshal's eyes. "At a place called the Sedalio House, cowboy."

And that was how Jody came to Hell's Half Acre, that nether world south of the Santa Fe tracks, crossing the line of demarcation to the dim and

ugly section where Dodge peace officers, by common consent, let lawlessness run rampant so long as it was confined to that one part of town. Jody knew about the district; he'd heard of it in campfire talk and in the long watches when the nighthawks had spoken of Dodge. The marshal had told him everything when he'd said where he'd sent Crystal. And now Jody had to see the girl again, but not to give her the money she'd wanted.

He inquired twice of passers-by before he found the Sedalia House, a gloomy frame structure that must have been standing when Dodge had been known as Buffalo City. He came into a hall so dark that he had to grope for the stairs, and these led him upward to another hall, dimly lighted and flanked by many doors. Somewhere in the building a man cursed drunkenly until high, shrill laughter drowned out the sound. Three of the doors opened, and Crystal looked from one of them, her eyes wide with astonishment as she recognized Jody. She hastily drew him into her room.

"The marshal!" she cried with sudden understanding. "He told you I'd be here!"

Illustrated by John Fulton

Crystal cried sharply, agonizedly: "Rolle! Don't!"

JODY didn't answer, merely stood looking at her, a hot, terrible anger buzzing in his ears. She'd discarded her cloak and bonnet, and he saw that her dress showed her silk-stockinged legs and fell low in the front; and he saw that her hair, which he'd remembered as yellow in those long-ago days, had acquired a reddish tinge that must have come out of a dye-bottle. He stared beyond her at the room; there was a rickety bureau and a chair, and the bed. He said then: "You didn't ask me how *I'd* been getting along since I left home, Crystal. I reckon you didn't give a hoot. A truck-patch wasn't my idea of what I wanted, and I ran away to Texas when I was thirteen to be a cowboy. I rode for every rag-tail outfit along the Pecos, and then I got a chance to sign on with the Twin-T. It's a big outfit, Crystal, and I'd like to stay with it. But a man has to measure up, for that."

She took a step away from him, her gaze hard and suspicious, and she said: "If this is the start of a sermon, I've heard too many of them. What is it you're trying to say?"

"Just that I almost risked my chances of keeping my job to give you a hand, because I thought you were telling me the truth. How many other fools have furnished a hundred dollars for train-fare home?"

The hardness went out of her face, and it turned white beneath the paint. "You think I was lying to you?"

"And why not? What's there at home for you?"

"Escape from this," she said, and her arm moved, sweeping the room, and she began to weep then, silently, putting her hands to her face while her shoulders shook. Her voice muffled, she said: "I did lie to you about Ma being sick, Jody. That wasn't why I wanted to be on that train at midnight."

He stared at her, feeling wretched, and wishing he hadn't been quite so harsh. He never had known what to do with a crying woman, but he couldn't bring herself to touch her, to comfort her. Not now. Yet not because of this place and her being in it; there'd been a time down in Texas when he'd been broke and hungry, and he'd thought of walking into a crossroads store with a gun in his hand; and he might have done it, only he'd stopped at a ranch first, and they'd fed him. He took the hundred dollars from his pocket and laid it on the bed, and he said: "All I want is your promise that I'm the last man who'll walk through that door."

He said it without looking at her, without waiting for an answer, and he closed the door softly behind him as he quit the room.

He met a man on the stairs, almost colliding with him in the gloom; and the fellow said in a soft voice: "Sorry, cowboy." Jody grunted and would have moved on, but the man said: "Got a match?" Jody found one, and the man brushed it against the

wall and touched the flame to a small evil-smelling cigar. He was a lean and catlike man, wearing the black cutaway coat of a gambler, and a flowered waistcoat with a watch-chain of nuggets strung across it, and a beaver hat tipped at the proper rakish angle. His skin was olive and flawless, and he had a whisper of a mustache above thin, over-red lips. He said, "Thanks, cowboy," and moved on upward.

Jody came out of the Sedalia feeling like a man who has toiled in a boghole extricating a calf from the mire, and who stands at last on firm, clean ground. He paused on the edge of the plank walk and drew in the night air, and he turned and looked back then, seeing the lighted rectangles that were the windows of the Sedalia, and marking the one that was hers. And while he stood watching, a silhouette moved against the drawn shade, the silhouette of a man wearing a tall beaver tipped at the proper rakish angle. A shadowy arm rose and nudged back the hat; and Crystal was suddenly silhouetted there too, and the two silhouettes blended and became one in an embrace.

AFTERWARD Jody didn't remember turning back and climbing the stairs again. In anger that left him weak and sickened, he found himself before the door of her room; he kicked it open and stepped inside. They were still standing by the window, still embracing, that catlike man and Crystal, the girl's arms about the man's neck, the man whispering to her in what might have been Spanish. They both became aware of Jody at the same time, and the catlike man whirled, pushing Crystal away from him and leaving his arms clear, and he said in that soft way of his: "Trouble, cowboy?"

Crystal cried sharply, agonizedly: "Rolle! Don't!"

It came to Jody now that indecision had ridden him ever since he'd entered Dodge City, that each new event of the night had left him with a choice to make and a doubt as to how to make it. But he knew what he wanted to

do now, and how to do it, and there was a joy in the knowledge as he came at the catlike man as a longhorn charges an unhorsed rider. *So this is Rolle Durango,* he thought. The fellow flicked a hand under the tail of his coat, and when the hand reappeared it had a derringer in it. Jody grabbed him by the wrist and twisted hard, and the tiny gun went skidding on the floor. Durango tried to bite him, but Jody turned him around and fastened one hand at the collar and the other at the seat of his pants, and he danced the man across the room and through the open door and shoved him at the stairs. Durango fetched up at the bottom of the steps with quite a clatter. *I hope I broke his fool neck,* Jody thought. But Durango scrambled to his feet, hissing and swearing. The outer door banged; he was gone.

Jody turned toward Crystal. "The money?" he said. "Where is it? Hand it over!"

Her hand fluttered toward the low-cut front of her dress. "You think—" she began.

"I *know* he's your man and the pair of you work together! I think he was waiting on the stairs because he heard my voice in this room, and didn't dare come in till you had me fleeced. I think he came here now for his cut."

His eyes must have given her the measure of his anger. Her hand dipped into the front of her dress, and she extended the roll of bills. He leafed through this and tucked the money into his trouser pocket.

As he turned toward the door again, afraid to trust himself to further words, she cried: "Wait, Jody!"

His voice became a lash. "How many times do you think you can make a fool of me in one night?"

She said: "Jody, will you do this: Will you *take* me to the train? Will you buy me passage and pay over the money with your own hand? Will you watch that train till it pulls out, so you can be sure in your mind that I'm on it? Would *that* convince you that I mean what I said? Or would you be afraid that I was working with the train crew, too, and that they'd let me off at the first stop with a share of the money given back to me?"

He stood baffled, feeling her desperation like a living, scorching thing, yet not understanding, not able to make sense out of this new request of hers, suspicion still strong and sharp in him. She said breathlessly: "I suppose I can't expect you to believe anything I'd say to you. But will you take one more chance? *Will you put me aboard that train?*"

"Get your things ready," he said.

He didn't want to think. He was afraid to think, for fear that thinking might show him the means by which she was once again using him. He wanted to believe in her, in spite of everything, no matter how fantastic that might be now. He paced the room nervously, and was glad to be able to busy his hands by helping her with the telescope straps. She got her cloak around her and donned the plumed bonnet she'd worn at the Opera House, and he lifted the telescope and got her by the arm and they started for the stairs.

WHEN they stepped out on the planking, Crystal pressed something bulky and hard into Jody's hand, and he stared in surprise; it was a six-shooter. She must have got it out of a bureau drawer, he realized. She said: "Take it. And keep it handy. A man doesn't do what you did to Rolle Durango and get away with it. I know him too well for that. His sneak gun's still up there on the floor, but he carries a forty-five in a shoulder holster, too. Watch yourself."

She crowded close against him; and on impulse, he put his free arm around her, still keeping the gun in his hand. To the north of the tracks the lights of Dodge's brighter world cast a sulphurous glow against the night sky, but down here Hell's Half Acre was like a shadowy limbo; even the sullen, ominous roar of the town was muted by distance. There was an intangible threat in the night, something weird beyond Crystal's warning and the mute reminder of the gun in his hand, something that kept Jody's eyes alert, probing every shadow, peering into the slots between buildings. And so they came through tangled streets until they were among the many white-washed shipping pens below the tracks, came without incident or challenge; but there seemed to be acres of these corrals, and Jody's high-heeled boots were hurting him long before he heard the chuffing of an engine on a siding and knew they were nearing the tracks.

It was almost midnight, he judged. The sky was overcast; and the stars, the cowboy's clock, were distant and hooded. *Have to hurry, or we'll miss the train,* he thought; but when he increased their pace, he found that Crystal, who'd been breathing heavily, was now, strangely, breathing more easily, and some of the tenseness seemed to be gone from her shoulders beneath his arm.

Then an orange ribbon of flame unfurled from the vicinity of one of the shipping pens, the bullet sighing past Jody's ear, and he lowered his free arm and tugged at Crystal awkwardly, edging her behind him; and that was impulse too. He let the telescope drop to the ground, and he shifted the six-shooter from his left hand to his right, and fired blindly at the spot of darkness from which the gun-flame had come. The gun bucked hard against the heel of his hand. He shifted side-

wise as he fired, and he felt a bullet plunk at his sleeve; but when he fired again, a man coughed and moved out from the distant shadows mincingly, and seemed to peer about as though searching for someone before he fell on his face.

Jody advanced cautiously, then touched the sprawled figure with the toe of his boot and saw the beaver where it had fallen and rolled a full pace away. He was sick then, a violence of stomach beyond denial, for he'd never used a gun in anger before tonight. As he came back to where Crystal stood waiting, men were shouting yonder, and there was a stampede of boots as they came running, drawn by the shots. Jody said, "He's dead, Crystal," and kept his eyes away from her face. "I'm sorry," he said then. "He's dead, and he must have meant something to you."

He wondered if she'd cry and hoped she wouldn't; her face, when he looked at her, was a ghastly mask. She said tonelessly: "He knew every rotten scheme there was for making a dollar, and for some of them he needed a woman. He trained me well, but the idea to get a hundred dollars out of you was my own idea. Yes, he meant something to me—something I wanted to fight against when he wasn't around. But whenever he whistled, I came; and it would always have been that way as long as I was near enough to hear him whistle. Even tonight, when you'd given me the money and left the room and I knew I was free, I melted because he took me into his arms. You see, Jody, it was *him* I've been trying to run away from. But there wasn't any way I could tell you and make you understand."

EVEN now he wasn't sure that he understood. He took the money from his pocket and thrust it into her hand. "Hurry now, or you'll miss the train," he said. "I'll stay to do the talking. Here come men now with questions to ask. Good-by, Crystal. Good-by—and good luck."

She stood on tiptoe and kissed him, straining hard against him, and then she grasped the telescope and went fleeing toward the tracks. A dozen men were suddenly around Jody, and some were looking at the body of Durango, and some were talking, a babble of voices; and one of these men was Flint Maxwell. Jody thought despairingly: *Of all the men in Kansas, he'd have to be here at a time like this!* It didn't even make sense, the Old Man being here, until Jody remembered that doubtless he'd been dickering about cattle-cars.

The Old Man said, "McClain!" a vast disbelief in his voice. "Just what is this?"

Jody told him, told him all of it, and while he was talking, he heard the whistle of the departing train. There were a dozen men listening, but Jody talked only to the Old Man, for it was as if the world had now narrowed down to the two of them. At the end Maxwell said: "Do I get this right? She was a childhood sweetheart?

"No," Jody said. "Just a girl I knew, long ago."

"You didn't owe her anything?"

"Not a thing," Jody said. "I didn't owe her a thing." And then, knowing what was inevitable and remembering that a man had a right to his pride, he said: "My private horse is out with the Twin-T remuda. I'll get him tomorrow. You'll be paying me off, I reckon."

The Old Man's face had nothing of softness in it, but he said, "Eh?" like a man recalled from something remembered. He frowned. "I do the hiring for the Twin-T," he said. "Likewise I do the firing. When I want to pay you off, I'll let you know. You can do me a favor now by getting into town and rounding up the crew. We've got cattle to load, come dawn."

Jody stared. "Sure," he said. "Sure, Mr. Maxwell." And he went running, because he needed the wisdom of Sam Travis now as he'd never needed it before. . . .

They were up into saddles, the bunch of them, and beyond Dodge they headed west, letting their horses run unchecked to where the herd was bedded. Sam Travis should have been riding up front—the right of gray hair and twenty years of saddle-whacking for the Twin-T—but he'd dropped back beside Jody; and Jody had talked then, telling him how it was, all of it.

Travis said: "Quit your frettin'. You're a hand now, kid. Otherwise he'd have paid you off instead of sending you after the rest of us."

"But he knows the truth!" Jody exclaimed. "He knows I gave her the money for no other reason than because I happen to be a soft-hearted, soft-headed fool!"

"I wonder," Sam Travis said softly. "What does a man like Flint Maxwell use for tallying when he measures another man? Would there have to be more to it than just being able to do the chores? Do you reckon that any *real* man would have to have it in him to be a grand fool just once in his life? You reckon that the Old Man might have made just as big a fool of himself at some time in his life, and was maybe remembering that tonight?"

"Sam!" Jody ejaculated. "You had a hunch all along that it might work out like this! You knew him better than anybody!"

Sam Travis smiled in the darkness. "Just the same, you owe me fifty bucks, kid," he said. "Don't be forgetting that. It's no more than fair. Every man should have to pay for his own experience."

Aegean Night

"The gods have not forsaken us. They live. Long have I walked among them, but never until this day have I had eyes to see them, or heart worthy to claim their fellowship."

HE drew the tarpaulin close about his shoulders. The breeze, pirouetting on the tiny wave crests, swirling in the gentle troughs, was a playful ballet before order is called. The steady night wind would be cold. He would have cause to be grateful for the tarpaulin. It had served well this afternoon when he had lain under it in the bow of the caïque, covered with nets and floats. How many hours? Two. Perhaps three. A moment in a free man's life, an eternity in hiding. Waiting. Listening. Hobnailed boots clattering on the quay—approaching, pausing. The voice of the fisherman, calm, laden with feigned respect. The rattle of papers changing hands—identification, clearance for night fishing. . . . Silence. Again the boots, this time receding, and a deep breath of the stale confined air which tasted like water, clear and cold from a mountain stream. He was good, this fisherman. . . . Aye, we are not forsaken by the gods.

Their destination was one of the myriad islands which dot the Aegean sea. To these islands had withdrawn the men in whose hearts still burned the fire of freedom, when the Peloponnesus, after heroic resistance, had bowed to the oppressor. Each was an Acropolis of the spirit. Not without proving himself, could one claim citizenship. This man would be welcome among these brave free souls who struck and struck again and never yielded.

The man in the bow of the caïque looked aft. The sun had withdrawn westward behind the island of Salamis; its pink marble made blue with a single brush-stroke, it was a bold foreground in the purpling pattern of the mountains of Megara against the darkening sky. The figure of the fisherman at the tiller blended into the evening light. Close by were other caïques moving silently on divergent courses for their fishing grounds. Far astern, the enemy control vessels were closing the harbor nets—the turnkey securing the straits for the night. Fools! They themselves were the jailed.

The wind steadied in the north. Sweeping across the Bay of Faleron, it bellied out their sail as the fisherman changed course slightly to run before it. On the port bow a pale moon had risen. Its dim light seemed to hush the noises of the night, setting a ghostly stage. The man, whose head had been bowed, now slowly raised eyes filled with the anticipation of one about to look on his beloved, each contour of her face, each shade of her expression familiar, yet thrilling. The hill, the Acropolis, marble-crowned stronghold impregnable, lay bathed in moonlight like a gem against the jeweler's dark velvet pillow of deep shadows. The columns of the Parthenon, a chorus, arms upraised, imploring, tore at his heart. Homeward bound, victorious, his ancient compatriots had taken bearings on the golden tip of Athena's spear, a sunstruck beacon. Those moonlit columns, the only remnant of the glory of the shrine, could guide their descendants on a homeward course. But before a son of goddess-mother can face toward home, must he not prove his worth? The man in the bow of the caïque turned. Forward lay darkness.

Last night, he reflected, he had been "free." Free to come and go—within set confines. Free to speak—all but what burned in his heart. Free to breathe—the putrid air of occupation. Tonight—tonight he was hunted. He filled his lungs with the clean salt air. Fugitive—he was free.

This morning. . . . Had it been this morning? In a day could you live a life's span, and taste immortality as well? . . . He had risen before the sun. The captor demanded long hours of his captive. The street in which his house stood was a barricaded military reservation. Troops were billeted in each of the small white houses. The men whose homes they were, those who still lived, were organized into a work corps which at first light formed at the head of the street. There behind a jungle growth of barbed wire, the tool-house stood. There hoes and spades, axes and saws, symbols of a peaceful fraternity, were guarded well. They were also potential weapons of destruction, of sabotage and death.

Today the corps would chop wood in the park beyond Mount Lycabettus. They had done it the day before, a hateful task. Wood to feed the enemy's fire during winter months to come. A pyre for a father's hope that his son, resting in the shade of a tree he had planted, might honor him with a grateful thought, or a word to the boy beside him.

They were mustered, bent bodies clothed in old military garb, in tailored suits which had once been their best but now were their only, uniform alone in their grotesque incongruity with the figures they attired. The men looked like skeletons shrunken away from the skin, forfeiting its protection.

Without looking up, each answered to his name. Except, he remembered, this man in the bow of the outward-bound caïque, except himself. He had raised his head and looked full into the eyes of the mustering sergeant. The scorn he saw had filled him with sullen hate. "Present." He spat the word. For months this hate had coursed through his body, at times pumped by such wild fury that it seemed his veins must burst. His passion, like a partly broken horse, ever pulled at the curb of his will, almost claiming mastery, always subdued. The time was not yet ripe to loose the rein.

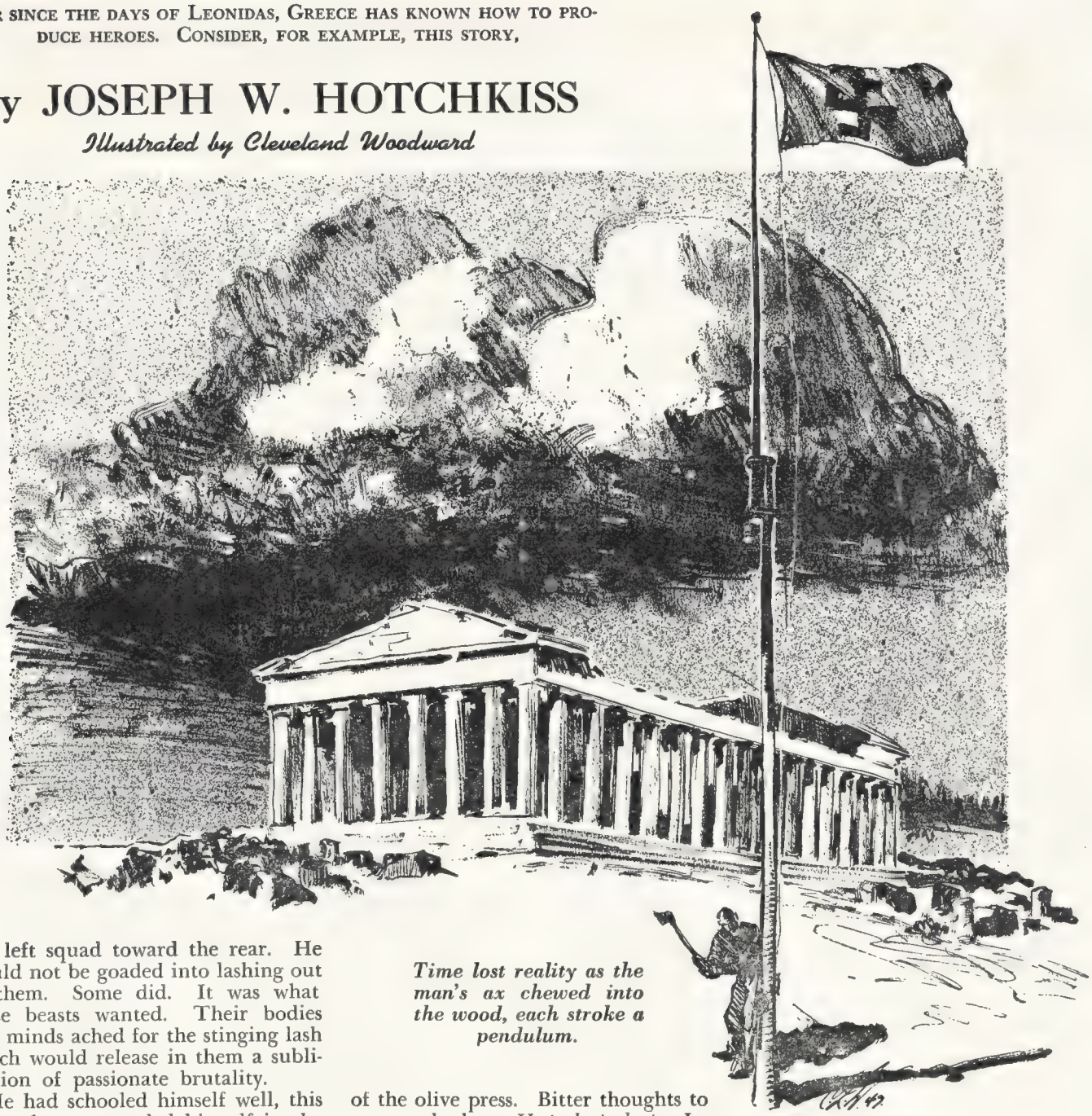
The dawn streamers of the rising sun touched the Acropolis with pink. As the morning light defined its planes and crevices, the sheer face of the hill seemed to spring to the defense of its marble crown, which rested serenely harmonious and aloof. The white flagstaff stood out sharp against the sky, not yet defiled by the banner which humiliated the very air that bore it. The flag and symbol of the city and the nation, the buildings of an ancient, worthier race, stood for the hour unchallenged in their supremacy.

IN a column of threes a position in an outside rank was best—a few feet nearer freedom, should an opportunity arise to break and run. Today, however, there was no jostling for the position. It was a long march. The center column would be the one of the three most free from the prods and jibes of the guards—pigs, fat, filthy swine. He took a position in

EVER SINCE THE DAYS OF LEONIDAS, GREECE HAS KNOWN HOW TO PRODUCE HEROES. CONSIDER, FOR EXAMPLE, THIS STORY,

by JOSEPH W. HOTCHKISS

Illustrated by Cleveland Woodward



Time lost reality as the man's ax chewed into the wood, each stroke a pendulum.

the left squad toward the rear. He would not be goaded into lashing out at them. Some did. It was what these beasts wanted. Their bodies and minds ached for the stinging lash which would release in them a sublimation of passionate brutality.

He had schooled himself well, this man who now settled himself in the bow of the caïque in which he had escaped. Escape? No! Escape was evading the responsibility of resistance. Escape was the easy way, not his way. His way was the way of the heroes. The moon disappeared into the clouds. The gentle swell rocked the caïque like a cradle. But sleep, partial death, was not for him, fellow of the immortals. . . .

Hup, hup—axes over their shoulders, the columns had swung into the Rue Amalie. The shadow of Hadrian's Arch mocked them as they passed. *Hup, hup, hup*—"City of Theseus". . . . "City of Hadrian" . . . Its inscriptions jeered at the column of marching men. Dead rulers from the past, in memory more real than the living conqueror whose rule rested on the city like the weight of the olive press. Bitter thoughts to a stern rhythm. *Hup, hup, hup.* La Rue Amalie was the great artery of the city. Running from the Acropolis, past the palace, past many Government buildings, it connected the heart of the city with its members. But it was an artery tied off. Midway stood the Hotel Grande Bretagne, once a gay sash to be worn with pride, now a relentless tourniquet, staff headquarters.

The sun climbed. *"O thou our Athens, violet wreathed, brilliant, most enviable city."* The words of Aristophanes floated in his mind like sweet water lilies in a dark and stagnant pool. "Halt." The word like a knife-stroke cut the flowers away. "Left face." Above them it rose slowly to the flagstaff's peak. Macabre motley to crown a venerable head, the flag of conquest floated out on a light morning breeze. Down snapped the arms of the guards. "Right face. Forward march."

HE could hear it now in the dark of night; the sound of it drowned the gentle lapping of the waves against the hull of the caïque. It had only been the whish of a stick and a hollow thud as it hit the old man's back. No more sound than a whisper; yet he would live with it always. Always he would see the kindly face of an old man transformed into that of a snarling wolf. Always he would feel the warm blood spurt over his hand as the guard fell close by his feet. The old man's ax, with the strength of desperation and the unswerving purpose of hate, had cleft

the skull of his tormentor. "A brave stroke, old one," he thought now in the dark in the caïque. "It is worth the death you will suffer. You have died that hope may live."

The confusion had been intense. On his hand was the blood of the guard. If he failed to take this chance, the opportunity to strike might be lost to him forever. To what purpose *then* the hateful months of waiting? In an instant his decision was made. Then, running, running, running, gripping the ax while he ran, knowing only that he must find sanctuary quickly to rest, and to determine to what use he might best put this coin, this liberty vouchsafed him by the gods. . . .

The cellar of the church was cold. Not the fresh clean cold of this night's sea air; the cold of the church cellar was the grasp of green bony fingers, befouling where they touched, squeezing the strength from vitals and sinews. The earthen floor on which he lay panting was the very marrow of the dead city. The ax was firm and hard in the grip of his right hand. No particle of light penetrated his hiding-place, this fearsome vacuum of darkness. Arising from the cellar floor, he fought the compulsion to dash into the sparkling azure daylight of the street. If he were to do so now, darkness would cling to him like a shroud, rushing out before, around, behind him, bearing him with it, a black wave of death cast up from some subterranean sea. Entombed, he was not ready for resurrection. The light he sought must come from within; it must be the light of purpose. Then in his mind he saw again the flag: an insignificant rectangle of bunting, yet a symbol of the degradation of his people.

Unsteady in the darkness, he put his hand against the wall to catch his balance. So he stood for a moment, seeming to draw strength through the bricks, from the core of the earth itself.

A VOICE, low, urgent, penetrated the consciousness of the brooding figure of the man wrapped in a tarpaulin in the bow of the caïque. "Lie low—on guard!" It was the voice of the fisherman.

A piece of the surrounding darkness broke off and drifted toward the craft. He could hear the low, almost idling pulse of engines; an enemy E boat on patrol. A light thud told him it had dropped alongside. He heard the fisherman identify his caïque, himself. A battle lantern swept the boat lazily, as a sleepy bird-dog whiffs a summer wind. A few words, seaman to seaman. The wind, the night. Then the increasing tempo of engine-throbs as the E boat pulled away from the caïque.

Easy. As easy as it had been that morning walking through the sun-drenched streets, stiff-legged, because the ax was concealed along the left side of his body, its handle extending down his thigh. The conquerors may have smiled complacently to see his clumsy emulation of their natural gait. A member of the labor corps going on assignment to some other group. He had his papers. He was safe from pursuit. The enemy would not yet have spread the alarm, although his disappearance had in all probability been discovered. Methodic hunters, they would assume that he was lying in hiding, planning tonight, tomorrow perhaps, to escape the city in disguise. Ample time for them to draw the net tight without noising among the people that a fugitive was at large. The merest spark fanned by the slightest breeze was dangerous in these times. Dry hearts, hearts drained of hope, are tinder.

Keeping to the crowded thoroughfares, he had walked south until they narrowed into crooked hilly streets where bone-thin fowl scrabbled in scanty offal, and naked children watched them hungrily.

CIVILIANS were not allowed past the great Propylaea which guard access to the Acropolis; thus were the conquered denied their birthright by the conqueror who sought to starve their souls. Climbing toward the guardhouse, his heart pounded in his breast. Upward, forward. He paused and gazed back at the unfolding vision of his land. Just beneath him the prison of Socrates amid its groves; to the west Salamis; in the distance the mountains of Megara, blue and serene. North lay the city, south the sea. Forward and upward he ascended; his heart was steady; his mind was sharp and clear.

There was, he knew, a work corps in the vicinity of the Parthenon. His plan to claim that he was on an errand to them had strength in its simplicity. After interminable minutes of questioning and examination of his papers, he passed the guards. Save for an hourly patrol, they stayed together in the familiar closeness of the guardhouse playing an unending game of cards. He would find the work corps to the south of the Parthenon; no need to send a nursemaid with him, eh, fellows? Just time to finish this hand before the next patrol. Reporting to the work corps foreman, he talked briefly in their native tongue. The foreman understood—at least he understood enough. He spoke a few words to the guard, who nodded disinterestedly and waved the man on to carry out his business.

The Pentelic marble of the Parthenon, washed by a thousand years of sun, gleamed white. He stood between the columns, a slight mortal treading sacred ground. He did not feel unworthy. The patrol passed, scarce noticing a laborer, insignificant, standing in repose between the Doric masses. Behind him the pneumatic drills of the work corps commenced their chatter. The sound, like gunfire, filled the air.

HE was quick. As he sat now in darkness in the caïque he smiled; he had been quick. A moment after the patrol had disappeared toward the guardhouse and the eternal game, he had darted like a lizard across the rock, freeing the ax as he ran. The flagpole towered above him, slight and tall. It had not been replaced with one of steel. Praise the gods, and O you deities, if you have not forsaken us, your sons, give strength! With fury he struck at it again and yet again. A stroke for you, old man, whose well-wrought blow drew the blood of which these wood-chips are the lees.

With reasonable luck he should have precious minutes, enough to accomplish his task. The patrol had passed. The work corps and its guard were on the other side of the Parthenon, and below it on the southern edge of the Acropolis. On this eternal rock it was grotesque to sense each second crawling like an ant, bearing a load so many times its size. Time lost reality as the man's ax chewed into the wood, each stroke a pendulum marking a second, a year, a thousand years. The mortal termite fused with the eternal champion.

The first crack, another stroke, another, a rending crash. It must be heard—no matter, he had triumphed! Pole, flag, entangling ropes, lay at his feet. Still the pneumatic drills kept up their chatter. Thoughtfully he stood above the wreck, grinding with his heel the fallen flag. The craft of consciousness, which had drifted into vast uncharted waters during the sublime moments of his intense physical activity, returned to its channel. He must flee.

His plans had not embraced complete success. Even now it seemed impossible that he had escaped detection. Yet he had. His deed, to which the whole city might have been an audience, would not be noticed by the guards until their next patrol. Before word of it reached them from the city, he would be gone. There were ways of insuring that information did not travel fast. Even his countrymen, the work corps, did not know of the blow which had been struck for them under the cover of the noise which they had created. Casually he walked across the flat top of the Acropolis, taking the precaution of hailing the work-corps foreman as he passed.

A great noise shook the caïque. . . . In the bow a figure slumped immobile.

He did not immediately descend the massive steps. To his left stood the temple of the Wingless Victory. Perfect in symmetry it stood on the promontory from which Aegeus in despair had cast himself upon the rocks below. "Wingless goddess. Athena Apteros!" He saluted and quickly sought the marble stairs.

With but a few curt words he was passed out by the guards. It was nearly time for the patrol to start out again. At the foot of the Acropolis he turned, raised his right hand in a salute, then disappeared in the direction of the city. . . .

Again the voice of the fisherman reached him, muffled in the night. "Not far from here there will be a gunboat of a friendly nation on rendezvous with our people tonight. You could claim their protection. It would be safe."

THE man in the bow was silent. *Safe? Then have I striven for nothing but to be safe?* Captivity was safety of a sort. With safety he could have hidden himself in the city, skulking, dodging, but in a manner safe. Why had he risked the five miles from Athens to the Piræus to meet this fisherman of whose loyalty he had heard? Was it to be safe? With safety the spark which burned within him could never be passed on to kindle other hearts. What is safety but submission?

"We will proceed to our destination, fisherman."

He felt the silent bond between them surge with a new strength.

No, it had not been easy, that flight to Piræus. Running, crawling on his belly through sewer-pipes, he had taken more chances than was prudent in his haste to arrive in time at the café where the fisherman transacted business. Haste too, to keep ahead of the news, to keep from being burned alive in the fire of his own kindling. When the alarm was spread, guards would be doubled, sleepy patrols alerted. The hunt, with him the quarry, would be on.

He recognized the fisherman. That morning he would have felt humble

before this figure, legendary for his courage and skill. He looked deep in the old man's eyes. "I have come to you, brother," he said, "because I need your help."

A new identity card and set of papers, *"Occupation: Fisherman,"* were easily arranged. The caïques lay gunwale to gunwale along the quay in the enclosed port area. *"Occupation: Fisherman."* In company with the old man, he passed the sentry's scrutiny. The caïque was outermost. No one looked twice at the two fishermen picking their way across the thwarts. Crews visited back and forth; wine bottles passed from hand to hand; songs, cut short by the clatter of hobnailed boots, resumed—sounds muffled by the tarpaulin under cover of which he lay. At last the clearance. And now. . . .

He smiled into the darkness, that blackest black preceding dawn's half-light. Their island destination must be close at hand. Although he could not see the stern, he sensed that the fisherman stood at the tiller peering into the night. The man in the bow arose stiffly. Rest, blessed sleep, and then again the fight.

CLOSE on the starboard bow a tiny point of red light pricked the darkness, whispering to the eyes. It was the pilot of the partisan band they were to meet. The recognition signal was correct. The man in the bow shook the tarpaulin from his shoulders and faced toward the light. The fisherman was mumbling curses. He was strangely slow, it seemed to the man, in answering the signal.

A great noise shook the caïque. The flash of a gun, fired close aboard, lit the sturdy craft. The partisans, alarmed when their signal was not answered, fired a warning shot, intended to cross the bow. The brief, almost blinding light showed the sail, the color of weathered brick. In the stern the figure of the fisherman could be seen frantically working over a signal light that had failed. In the bow a figure slumped immobile, half in, half out of the boat.

From the other craft came a muttered growl of an older man grimly chiding a youngster, nervous and tense: "Fool, your finger is faster than your wit."

Dawn broke. The blood of the man in the bow of the caïque flowed in a slow rivulet into the Aegean. The drops showed red for a moment, then diffused into the waters of the sea.

The gods have not forsaken us. They live. They walk among us, but few are given eyes to see them or heart worthy of their fellowship. It is a noble gift, not lightly given. And it is never given in vain.

The Birth

Now can be told the story of the wartime situation which brought about the plans of today.

ARMED guards stalked the Pentagon corridor. Security police were everywhere. In G-1, a colonel turned the last page of a long report, looked up, tight-lipped, from his desk.

"And then, in six months, we won't have any Army!"

It was the third winter of the war. In Italy, the Fifth was slugging its way up the Apennines. General MacArthur and the Navy were island-hopping in the Pacific. In England, General Eisenhower was mounting the great D-Day offensive which was still to come.

The Pentagon pulsed with the demands of war. Official channels ran deep with urgent plans. More men; more supplies! Expedite! Expedite! They want it yesterday!

So the specter the colonel had raised—the specter of a postwar army without soldiers—was elbowed aside at first; but it shouldered its way back at last into the highest staff conferences. It pulled generals away from their maps and set colonels to working furiously on reports.

Some jet-propelled worry-wart—but one with a sound eye to the future—had conjured it up one wintry afternoon while the Russians were still fighting inside their own borders. He had reasoned it out this way:

By law, every Regular Army man, every National Guardsman, every Reservist and every draftee is in the Army for the duration of the war and six months. By law, all enlistments for fixed periods (which might assure some forces six months after the war) are barred. So, six months after the war, (so the thesis went) we'll have an army of officers only. That's not good.

Something would have to be done to keep the "ONE ARMY WANTED" sign from going up. Congress would have to be asked to authorize enlistments. That would mean a law. But what law? And where would the recruits come from?

These were only some of the questions. There were lots of others. How big an army would be wanted? Could the benefits Congress provided for wartime soldiers be preserved for those who reënlisted? What would have to be done about pay, and training facilities, and furloughs, and recreation? The questions seemed endless.

Oddly enough, one of the toughest questions involved the so-called "old Regulars." By law, every old Regular had the right to reënlist in the new Army, and so places would have to be held for them. But—how many of them were there? Nobody knew, and it seemed that nobody would be able to find out. For although the old Regulars had formed the backbone of the wartime Army, they had all been lumped into that wartime Army along with National Guardsmen, Reservists and draftees without specific tags. Their files were mixed now with millions of others.

The solution of these problems was essential to the development of the Army's demobilization plan. After a dozen statistical approaches had been discarded, a colonel of the Reserves hit upon an amusingly simple solution. He recalled that enlisted men in the old Regular Army had contributed ten cents a month to the maintenance of the U. S. Soldiers' Home, the contribution being deducted from their pay. Solution: An exercise in arithmetic with the amounts being paid into the funds of that institution gave a quick check on the approximate number of Regulars still in service.

But the solution of such problems was taking time. When they were first raised, months before D-Day, there had been no need for haste. But by early 1945, time was pressing. France was overrun; the Russians were at Danzig; the Canadians were attacking along the lower Rhine.

It was time for action. To avoid further delay, a simple measure was projected. Congress was asked to authorize the Secretary of War to accept original enlistments for the Regular Army. The term proposed was the duration of the war plus six months or three years, whichever was longer. No complicated questions were raised.

By March, Congressional committees were actively considering the bill. A defect was soon noted—there was no limitation on the size of the future army. Quickly the ceiling was fixed at "the total peacetime strength of the Regular Army now or hereafter authorized by law," a limitation which

of the New Army

by MAJOR GENERAL ST. CLAIR STREETT, U.S.A.

was to prove the source of some future embarrassment.

But despite the last-minute recognition of the seriousness of the problem and the rush to meet it, VE-Day found the War Department still without legal authority to recruit a postwar army. But it was not lacking for long. On June 2, 1945, twenty-four days after VE-Day, President Truman signed the recruiting authority for which the Army had asked.

BUT new difficulties soon became apparent. In the first place, the law limited the new army to 280,000 men. When the method for determining the number of regulars still in the Army was applied, it showed that by this time there were 419,000. In addition, there were fifty-six thousand more discharged to serve on active duty as Reserve officers, or to accept temporary commissions, who had the statutory right to reënlist at their old grades. This meant that there were 475,000 men who had a legal claim on 280,000 berths! Not all would reënlist, but there was a problem.

Furthermore, an Executive Order which had terminated wartime enlistments had permitted reënlistments from civilian life only during the first 15 days after discharge. The new law set the period at three months. Then, too, the law providing mustering out pay and "travel home" allowances authorized their payment only to those making their *final* separation from military service. Rather than sacrifice these benefits, it was feared many would accept discharge rather than reënlist, even though Regular Army pay scales had been more than doubled.

Pentagon personnel officers were hard at work on an official field circular explaining all the complications when Japan surrendered. While the country celebrated and the victory celebration denuded the Pentagon of its stenographic forces, a conference was hastily called to meet the new situation.

That conference, August 15, 1945, marked the real beginning of the great postwar recruiting campaign for volunteers. The "Make It a Million" campaign was officially begun with the passage by Congress of the Armed Forces Voluntary Enlistment Act in October, 1945.

The War Department, when it started the campaign, had a lot of inducements. Some of them looked pretty fancy, and there was a good deal of talk in the private precincts of the Pentagon about "The Red Apple Army"—especially on the part of Regular Army men who had been brought up in a somewhat more Spartan atmosphere. None the less, it was a plain fact that the Army needed inducements. The job was nothing more nor less than to get 1,000,000 volunteers, the first step in building and maintaining an Army of just over a million men on a permanent basis. And, inducements or no inducements, there were still a lot of hurdles to be taken.

There was the matter of that circular in the first place. It had been ready in all its major details, but the Pentagon conferees, confident Congress would approve in view of the pressure sure to develop against further inductions, had decided to ignore the 280,000-man limitation and to include in the circular the first of the famous "red apple" incentives. This had to do with reënlistment furloughs.

The other obstacles to reënlistment, it was pointed out, would require legislative action, but the reënlistment furlough already authorized by Army Regulation could be exploited to the utmost. Even in prewar times a furlough home had been an attraction—and a furlough home from Germany or Japan was bound to encourage thousands to reënlist.

But there was no time to lose. A staff of stenographers was hastily assembled and the staff rushed the new circular out. By ten-thirty P.M., on August 15, the first draft was in the hands of the Adjutant General. By six A.M. the next day, advance copies had been completed and dispatched by air to all major commands throughout the world.

Later the same day, the following telegram arrived at the War Department:

MANCHESTER, NHAMP
AUGUST 16 1945 7352
ASSISTANT CHIEF OF STAFF
IN CHARGE OF PERSONNEL
WAR DEPARTMENT WASHINGTON DC
WISH TO VOLUNTEER FOR 3-YEAR ENLISTMENT IN ARMY. PLEASE COMMUNICATE DETAILS
JOSEPH E. CHAPUT 45 MYRTLE STREET

Here, so far as could be told, was the first volunteer. A hasty check revealed that Chaput had been honorably discharged from the Enlisted Reserve Corps the year before, after transfer to work in essential industry following induction. He was forty, and over-age, but because of the desire to initiate the new program without delay his enlistment was authorized.

Despite the complications, reënlistments began pouring in after a slow start. By the end of September they had reached six hundred a day, with 13,396 reported for the month.

Meanwhile, the committees in Congress were busy eliminating the restrictions and reddening the apple. One-year enlistments were written into the bill over the objections of the War Department, which knew that time lost in training and travel would leave one-year men little time for service abroad. Additional "benefits and emoluments" for enlistment and reënlistment were provided and, in a final rush, a new bill was passed by the House and Senate on October 4, 1945.

THEN, one of those things happened—and almost kept the Army from putting its new law swiftly into effect. And it was none other than the Navy which almost upset the plan.

Aware of the provisions of the new bill, the War Department had prepared a circular for immediate distribution. Revisions in the bill had actually been phoned hourly to the Pentagon during its passage through Congress. But the President's signature was still lacking. A parade for Admiral Nimitz had kept the messenger carrying the bill from reaching the White House during office hours—and the President was leaving Washington at nine A. M. the next day.

While plans for carrying the bill to him by plane were being made, the War Department took a calculated risk. Working past midnight, personnel officers prepared the final draft of the necessary circular based on the bill. A crew of printers, readied for the purpose, turned out large numbers of the circular by eight A. M. the

next day. It had even been given a number—310—and dated for that day—October 6. But would the President sign the bill or would the circular have to be thrown away and a new one printed under a later date?

The pressure continued until 9:05 A. M. Then word came that the President had signed the bill into law before starting his trip, and the great recruiting drive was on. Copies of the circular were air-mailed everywhere. To speed the distribution, plates were prepared and dispatched to all overseas theaters to speed the printing of additional copies there.

The liberal provisions of the new law quickly did their work. Enlistments and reënlistments reached 93,404 in October. They soared to 187,826 in November and continued over one hundred thousand in December and January.

THE rush of enlistments and reënlistments was almost overwhelming. Wholesale applications at training centers, overseas replacement depots and ports of embarkation held up the shipment overseas of replacements for combat veterans while soldiers arriving at the overseas theaters walked down the gangways, enlisted in the Regular Army at the nearest center and were promptly returned to the United States to spend their newly earned reënlistment furloughs.

Meanwhile, the continuing inductions spurred enlistments at home. Men, inducted one day, enlisted for the fixed and probably shorter tour of duty the next. Youths signed up to "beat the draft." The War Department soon found itself with an Army of short-term soldiers. For a time, there were so many soldiers on reënlistment furloughs that it became almost impossible to provide replacements overseas.

Even the Recruiting Service was hit by the furlough fever. Many soldiers assigned to recruiting duty promptly enlisted or reënlisted in the Regular Army and took off on furlough, leaving only a few to handle the unprecedented volume of recruits. Noncommissioned officers in many key jobs promptly did the same. Quick action was needed—it came in the form of War Department authorization for deferment of reënlistment furloughs, which relieved the strain.

Out of all the confusion, however, there emerged some basic and significant facts.

First of all, the "red apple" inducements had served the nation well. In October, 1946—just one year from the actual start of the "make it a million" drive—the Recruiting Service was able to report its one millionth volunteer. The recruit picked as "Mr. One Million"—a Baltimore boy named Irving Bennett, Jr.—was duly sworn in at the Pentagon. Never before in peacetime had any nation, anywhere on the face of the earth, built so large a volunteer Army.

Questioned as to why they had joined, the new recruits gave some interesting answers. Among the young men, a very large percentage cited Army training facilities, or the educational advantages of the G.I. Bill of Rights, as their Number One reason. Others cited the generous retirement benefits, which permit career soldiers to retire on half pay after twenty years or three-quarters pay after thirty years. Some said that Army pay, when free benefits were counted in, was just plain higher than civilian pay.

All this was music to the ears of the busy officers charged with the job of building the Army. But they barely had time to relax overnight before they started right in again. For the fact of the matter was that the one million achievement was in part illusory.

To begin with, many of the men who joined up during the first year—about half of them—were short-termers, enlisted for one-year or 18-month terms. And by the time the one million mark was reached, thousands and thousands of soldiers were becoming eligible for discharge. They had to be replaced—at a rate which approximated thirty-five to forty thousand a month during the latter part of 1946. In addition to this, a good many misfits had got into the Army; they had to be weeded out and replaced with abler men. And there was the normal process of attrition to contend with. It was clear that getting the first million was only half of the assignment—that the job was only half done.

In addition to these numerical problems, the Army found that some of its inducements had been temporary in character. For example, soldiers who enlisted for three years by October 6, 1946, were assured of a free four-year college education when they got out, while soldiers who enlisted after that deadline were assured only of some free education.

The really basic and solid appeals, however, were still there, as they are today. The experts in such things say that there are three things every man wants in a job—good pay, security, and a chance for advancement. Recruiting officials are not bashful in pointing out that the new Army has all three—the highest pay of any Army in history, lifetime security with liberal retirement provisions, and a chance for bright young men to climb the ladder.

In offering these opportunities, the Army is the first to admit that it has a special reason for doing so. And this reason has to do with the fact that the Army is frankly seeking the best young men it can get.

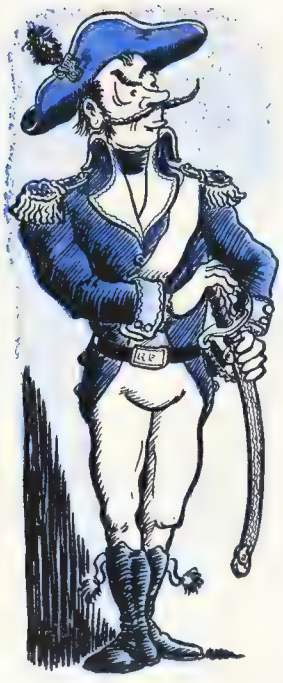
They point out that the scientific Army on which we now depend has no place for the mule-tending doughboy of the past. The new Army must be a far cry from the "drill, ye terriers, drill!" outfit of the old song. The proper use and maintenance of modern weapons requires a very large measure of intelligence and ingenuity. American industrial and scientific development has given the Army a significant lead in arms and equipment. Such weapons as the atom bomb, the proximity fuse, the B-36—these and all the others require real ability and skill on the part of the men who use them. Unless we can match our mechanical gadgets with equally able brains, the nation can throw away its present superiority.

And there is another consideration: the peacetime rôle of the Army. The War Department is quick to point out that the Army has dozens of assignments which have a close connection with our everyday life—ranging from river and flood control to experimental chemistry which can improve the lot of millions of farm families; ranging from new methods of flight testing that make for air safety to medical discoveries which can raise our standards of health to new heights.

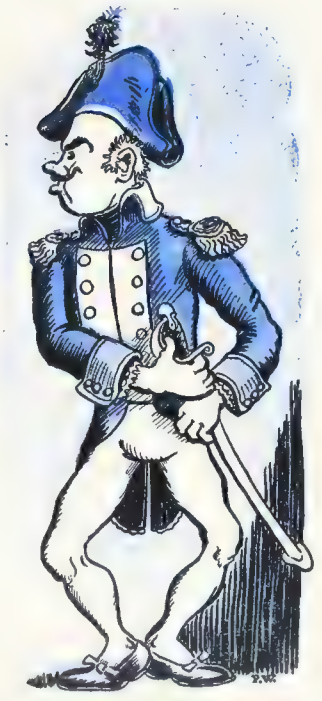
IT is recognition of such facts as these which lies behind the War Department's present drive for volunteers, for the Army knows the *volunteer* possessing the qualifications of intelligence and resourcefulness it most requires is happiest.

The Army recognizes, at the same time, that this policy has placed it in direct competition with other professions in trade and industry. So it is constantly seeking ways of improving the service, of making it more attractive to men of the highest types. So, while some of the sugar-coated inducements of the "red apple" days are on the way out, the Army is offering more solid appeals. It is molding itself into an amalgam of intelligent men, and machines so complex that they sometimes seem to have the intelligence of men.

The million intelligent men needed represent a substantial share of the Nation's reservoir of intelligence—but they are being offered a profession in which intelligence, enterprise and resourcefulness receive recognition on a par with that held out by any other calling. The men who serve in this modern scientific army will have much to give as well as to gain. They will be pioneers for peace in the very broadest sense, for the Army is playing a leading rôle in these trying days of transition from national rivalries to world organization.



The Long Duel



They fought—not continuously, but continually—for nineteen years.

by JOHN RICHARD YOUNG

Illustrated by Peter Wells

IN the bloodstained annals of dueling, since the duel as an institution was first introduced among the Lombards in 659 A.D., no stranger record exists than that of a grudge fight between two French officers of Napoleon's army. Their incredible combat, a series of duels, lasted nineteen years.

Like many of the deadliest duels, this one had a trivial beginning.

In 1794, in Strasbourg, a hot-headed young lieutenant, one Fournier, killed a popular local youngster who was named Blum. Since the officer had been the challenger and the victim belonged to a prominent family, the good burghers of Strasbourg were considerably angered.

Lieutenant Fournier's commanding officer, General Moreau, was merely vexed, though for a different reason.

"A most unfortunate affair," the General grumbled to his aide, Captain Dupont. "Certainly a gentleman must always be ready to defend his honor, particularly a man whose profession is arms. But why did Fournier have to kill this fellow only two days before my wife's birthday ball? Damn it, I've already sent him an invitation."

"Monsieur and Madame Blum will hardly attend a ball," the Captain pointed out, "a day after their son's funeral."

"No, but most of their friends will; I've invited all the prominent people in town. The Lieutenant—and my wife—might be embarrassed. You understand?" The General, seated at his desk, squinted thoughtfully at his polished boots. "Perhaps it would be better, Captain, if—ah—our young fire-eater did not put in an appearance at the *soirée* tomorrow evening."

Captain Dupont, tall and broad-shouldered, himself victor in a score of affairs on the field of honor, smiled. "I myself shall be at the door, *mon Général*. I doubt that Lieutenant Fournier will attend the ball."

The Lieutenant did not attend; for in the foyer leading to the ballroom Captain Dupont, watchfully waiting, intercepted him. In a curtained alcove off the hall the two young officers, resplendent in gold-braided dress-uniforms, faced each other.

"I regret the necessity of suggesting, Lieutenant, that you look elsewhere for entertainment this evening."

"What's that?" Lieutenant Fournier, stocky and cat-quick of movement, scowled. "Who, sir, are you to offer me suggestions? The General invited me—"

"A lamentable mistake, Lieutenant. The General tenders his regrets—"

"Mistake? Regrets?" The stocky young man flushed angrily. "Sir, I demand a reason for this outrageous treatment! Why—"

Captain Dupont had been willing to explain, but the junior officer's fiery arrogance nettled him.

"Since when, sir, do lieutenants have the right to demand reasons of their commanding officers? As the General's aide," the Captain said curtly, "I order you to leave. At once!"

Fournier, livid with rage, drew himself stiffly erect.

"If the General finds my presence unwelcome, though it was at his express invitation I came here—damn the General! But you, sir, shall answer for this insolence. You may expect to hear from me."

"With pleasure, Lieutenant." Captain Dupont's blue eyes glittered recklessly as he bowed. "I trust you will find me more interesting than Monsieur Blum."

The next morning a major of cavalry called on the Captain with the impetuous Lieutenant's formal challenge demanding "the satisfaction customary among gentlemen." Captain Dupont, though one of the best pistol-shots in the French Army, chose rapiers, that being the type of weapon with which Fournier had slain Blum.

That same evening, an hour before sunset, the two officers, accompanied by their seconds and surgeons, crossed swords in a meadow a few miles outside Strasbourg.

They were evenly matched, the Lieutenant's furious offensive speed checked by the Captain's rocklike defense. They fought silently, in deadly earnest, wasting no movement in spectacular flourishes. This was no pink-tea affair between boulevard fops, but a grim combat between professional fighting-men used to facing death and dealing it out. Lieutenant Fournier, raging with humiliation, wanted blood. The Captain saw that he got it.

PARRYING a murderous throat-lunge, Dupont drove his blade completely through his antagonist's left shoulder.

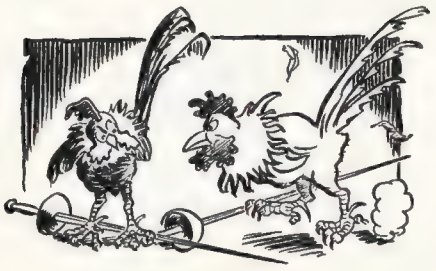
"Halt!"

The wounded man's second, sword in hand, leaped between the combatants. Despite the Lieutenant's protests, his surgeon pronounced the wound serious; his second refused to allow him to continue.

Captain Dupont, shifting his reddened sword, advanced smiling. "Are you satisfied, Lieutenant?"

"I am not." Fournier accepted the outstretched hand, but did not return the smile. "You will hear from me again, Captain."

"Again? But certainly. I shall always be at your service—any time, any



place, any weapons. Jacques, fetch that bottle of brandy in the coach. Lieutenant Fournier must replace that blood he is losing with something as warm."

Lieutenant Fournier's blood remained warm—in fact, near the boiling-point. In a month his wound bothered him less than his consuming impatience to avenge what he considered a lucky thrust. Again Captain Dupont refrained from specifying pistols. Realizing that Fournier was intent now mainly on salving his shattered pride, the Captain wished to be quite fair.

Shortly after sunrise the next day, however, Captain Dupont—stretched on the dewy grass in his own blood while his surgeon swabbed out the hole Lieutenant Fournier's steel had made in his neck—was wishing that he had not been quite so fair.

Lieutenant Fournier, beaming with pleasure in a job well done, handed him a bottle of brandy.

"I hope, Captain, you will recover as quickly as I did."

"So do I," Dupont mumbled painfully. "And when I do, Lieutenant, you will hear from me—immediately."

"Is not honor satisfied now?"

"Not my honor, sir." And then the Captain, knowing his foe's mettle, dropped a hint that was really a veiled dare: "Until now I have accommodated you with swords, though my own preference has always been for pistols. Perhaps our next meeting will end differently."

"Who knows?" And Fournier added delicately: "I'm not the worst shot in the Army myself, Captain."

WHEN he could again turn his head without wincing, Dupont wasted no time sending a challenge. Lieutenant Fournier expressed himself honored, called for pistols at ten paces. So for a third time these two officers, who had no real quarrel but were slaves to the dueling mania of their day, faced each other on the bloody field of honor.

They fired—and fell, almost simultaneously, each grievously wounded. As they lay on the turf, being attended by their respective surgeons, Fournier called out:

"Are you dying, Dupont?"

"No. Are you?"

"Not now. I can't die, because I've sworn to kill you."

"The hell you will! You started this. I'm going to finish it."

"*Gentlemen!*" protested one of the horrified seconds. "This is most irregular!"

"Shut up," Dupont told him weakly. "Fournier, sooner or later we'll be assigned to different posts. Will you fight me again, if ever we meet?"

"Gladly, Captain, gladly."

Lying there on the field near the point of death, the two men solemnly agreed that whenever and wherever they found themselves within a hundred miles of each other, each would ride halfway to meet his opponent, and they would fight again. They swore to keep on fighting until one killed the other.

For nineteen years the two officers religiously kept their oath. Soldiering all over the Continent as Napoleon rearranged the map of Europe—campaigning in Italy, Austria, Egypt, Syria, Spain, Russia—yet did these two retain unquenched their zest for personal combat. Keeping in touch by letters, with the zeal of fanatics they sought each other out at every opportunity, and fought.

They carved each other with sabers, punctured each other with rapiers and bullets, fought afoot and on horseback, and indoors as well as out. Usually they dined together after a fight; if the loser was unable to sit up, the other spent hours visiting at his wounded foe's bedside.

And the oftener they fought, the stronger their mutual affection grew—yet the more savagely would they fight next time. Their chief fear on parting always was that the other would be killed in battle before they could meet again. Each was obsessed by the idea of killing so brave and skillful an opponent.

But they simply could not kill each other according to the strict *code duello,* which rules that a duelist seriously wounded may not honorably be permitted to continue fighting. Neither officer ever tried to take the slightest unfair advantage.

By 1813 the battle-scarred veterans were both generals. That year each was ordered to Switzerland. Dupont, arriving in a small town late at night, learned that General Fournier had already put up at the best inn. Dupont demanded an adjoining apartment, tossed his cloak to his aide and stamped upstairs to his old friendly enemy's room just as Fournier was preparing for bed.

"My dear Fournier, we meet again!"

"Dupont, you old rascal!" Fournier's eyes danced as he reached for his sword hanging on the wall. "What an unexpected pleasure!"

"Defend yourself."

"Defend *your*self, General!"

The blades glittered wickedly in the candlelight. Downstairs, the young aide heard the slithering clash of steel on steel, and went on telling the innkeeper what General Dupont would like for dinner.

The duel ended abruptly when Dupont ran his steel through Fournier's neck, pinning him to the wall.

"You've the devil's own luck," Fournier grumbled as the victor bandaged the wound. "But I'll fight you tomorrow."

"In this condition? I—"

"In any condition! Who knows when we'll meet again? I insist!"

"As the challenged party," Dupont said, "I have the right to prescribe the conditions. We shall meet at dawn in the woods near Neuilly. Each of us shall have two pistols. We'll go into the woods together, walk apart fifty paces each, then turn and fire at will."

"One hundred paces!" Fournier stared at his opponent curiously. "You must be getting old, Dupont."

"You can cut the distance to one pace, General, by merely walking toward me, firing as you please."

"But—why—"

"Because I am determined that this shall be our last duel."

IN the dim gray of false dawn they rode together to the woods near Neuilly. The sky was changing from rose to pink as they stood back-to-back in a small clearing. Counting aloud in unison, they started walking in opposite directions.

". . . forty-eight, forty-nine, fifty."

Dupont faced about sharply, both long pistols leveled. Through the straight-boled trees he caught sight of Fournier sauntering nonchalantly toward him. Warily Dupont advanced to meet the other man.

They had cut the distance in half when Fournier, near the clearing, suddenly swung up his right-hand pistol shoulder-high. Dupont leaped behind a tree a split-second before the shot shattered the morning stillness. He heard the heavy ball thud into a tree behind him.

Crouching, he risked a peek around the thick trunk. For a moment he could not locate his enemy; Fournier also had dodged behind a tree. Then Dupont detected a slight movement—a coattail protruding from behind a trunk close by the spot from which Fournier had fired. Fournier was getting ready to take a peek himself.

Dupont pulled his head in. Standing erect, he placed his cap on the muzzle of one of his pistols. Slowly he pushed the cap into view around the trunk—a simple ruse, yet old because it was good—good especially on impetuous fellows like Fournier, who acted first and reflected afterward.

The trick worked. Fournier's last ball, carefully aimed, plucked the cap from the gun-muzzle. The charge roared through the woods, died.

"Are you hit?" Fournier called.

Dupont stepped out from behind his tree, cocking the hair-trigger dueling pistols. Leveling the big guns at his antagonist's chest, he strode forward across the small clearing.

Fournier, stone-still, watched his advance without change of expression.

"General Fournier, your life is now in my hands."

"And my death," Fournier retorted calmly. "Well, General, it was a great game we played. I thank you for nineteen of the best, most exciting years of my life. Accept my apologies for such atrocious shooting."

Dupont halted with the pistols hardly a foot from Fournier's chest.

"You and I, Fournier, are not young cockerels any more. It is time we settled down—at least it is for me. I am engaged to be married—"

"Married!"

"—to a wealthy widow in Gascony. A most admirable woman, Fournier, as virtuous and handsome as she is rich. That is why I am determined this affair of ours must end here and now, forever."

"I am ready, Dupont, when you are. Before you shoot, accept my sincere congratulations. Wealthy, eh?"

"I am not going to shoot, General—now. I don't want your life. But if ever we meet again on the field of honor," Dupont said grimly, "I want you to remember the weapons must be pistols, and I am entitled to the first two shots—distance, *three feet.*"

Fournier glanced at the .56-caliber muzzles centered unswervingly on his chest.

"General Dupont," he said thoughtfully, "you and I have fought our last duel."

Honor Was a Strange Affair

by Harold Helfer

THE duel seems a bizarre institution in this so-called enlightened Twentieth Century; but even back in the days when dueling was the fashion, some unusual affairs of honor took place.

For instance, once a duel took place between a man and a dog. That was during the reign of King Charles V of France. The dog's master, a man named Audry Mondidier, was slain and buried, and his dog stood watch over his shallow grave for several days. When no one came along, the dog went to the house of Chevalier Ardilliers, the best friend of the murdered man. The dog's howling and manner in general gave Ardilliers to understand that he wanted to be followed. Ardilliers did, and the dog led him to the grave.

Then, shortly afterward, although he had come in contact with a number of other persons, the dog attacked a man named Chevalier Maquer. The dog turned on this man every time he saw him, and people began to say that he must be the man who slew his master.

The King finally heard about all this and decreed that the two, man and dog, must fight a duel to settle the matter. Chevalier Maquer had a sword, and it might seem that the advantage lay with him; but the dog, leaping at his antagonist, managed to avoid the rapier and knocked the man down.

Maquer then confessed that, in truth, he was the one who had killed the dog's master.

Then there was the duel between Benjamin Constant, the great French political writer, and Farbin des Issarts—fought with both men seated. Constant was a cripple, so in deference to his condition his opponent too sat down.

The chairs were placed within ten feet of one another and both men blazed away. But when the smoke cleared away, neither man was hurt and that's the way the affair ended.

A duel that had a more tragic result was the one fought between Perrot and Arlequin. Each missed the other but fatally wounded his second.

There was one duel that was fought with pills. It seems a man named Cagliostro called some physician a quack, and it was decided that the duel, in keeping with the nature of the difference between the two men, should have a medicinal flavor. So two pills, one poisoned, one ordinary, but both looking exactly alike, were brought before the two men. It is not recorded which of the men selected the poisoned pill and which survived.

But that perhaps is not one whit stranger than the duel between two men named Lenfort and Mellant. Their argument was over a billiard game, so it was decided that they would draw lots and that the winner would hurl a billiard ball at the other. Lenfort won, and he chunked the ball with such force and accuracy that it killed Mellant.

No duel ever was fought on a higher plane than that between a M. de Grandpré and M. le Pique. They took to balloons. And that was on May 3, 1808, when not so very much was known about matters aëronautical.

But their difference involved a very beautiful and celebrated woman, Mademoiselle Tirevet, an opera dancer, and they were determined to have it out in a fittingly dramatic manner. So up they went, each in his own balloon and armed with a blunderbuss. When they had ascended eight hundred yards they began shooting it out. Grandpré was the more successful. His gunfire ripped into Pique's balloon, and sent him and his aircraft crashing onto the roof of a house.

Reversing the customary procedure, a couple of women, Comtesse de Pligmar and Marquise de Nesle, fought a duel over a man. The Marquise got only the branches of a tree, but the Comtesse clipped off one of the Marquise's ears.

BY far the most amazing woman duelist was Mademoiselle Maupin, an actress, who lived in the time of King Louis XIV. She had a fiery temper, backed by an unusually keen eye with the pistol, and she was forever challenging men who offended her. But they had either seen samples of her marksmanship or heard about it, and wisely declined.

But one night at a ball the actress got into a quarrel with another woman, and when several men came to the defense of this woman, Mademoiselle Maupin immediately challenged each of them to a duel.

This time it came off. The actress shot it out singly with each of the men, and killed them all. It is not recorded exactly how many men were involved, but it is stated that after the last one fell, Mademoiselle Maupin calmly returned to the gayety of the ball!

A young cargo airline takes a difficult contract—and a long chance.

by ROBERT GOLD

High

GEORGE was watching them cart the crates out of the converted '47 when a set of fingers suddenly crept up the back of his neck and tugged at his ears.

She came inside his arms as he turned around. The crest of her hair came up to his chin, and he looked over her head as he hugged her.

"This kind of a reception committee ought to be on the company payroll," he sighed.

"Make that a private offer," she whispered, "and see what happens!"

She slid her arm through his as they walked across the runway ramp toward the hangar.

"George, I want to get married." Gloria said it without looking at him. "I've considered all the things you've told me, and I've tried to understand them. I can't. . . . I can't even understand you. For three years you wrote about us, but now, when I finally get you home—"

"Look, honey," he explained patiently, "I love you much too much to let you marry a pauper."

"You're talking about the president of Sky-Way," Gloria reminded him.

"Which is what I meant," George smiled grimly.

The boys were sprawled around the table in the hangar office. Feet were put back on the floor as Gloria came in, and someone paused in the middle of a picturesque story. Smoke spiraled up from the community ashtray on the table, lending an aromatic tinge to the atmosphere.

George counted heads.

"We have a quorum," he decided. "Meeting called to order."

Gloria sat quietly in a corner of the room. There were nine men around the table, and she knew them all. Behind that mechanic's grease was Joe Dvorak, out of pre-war Kansas City, now an ex-T5, AAF. Harry Weintraub, the boy with the earphones wrapped around his neck, went from the Bronx to Burma, sat in a B17 nook pounding brass and listening to static for a few years, now was a civilian and still listening to it. . . . Charley Clyde, the big boy chewing gum and smoking a cigar simultaneously—he looked like a grocer from Vermont. He was from Vermont, but he had taken off a major's cluster and three different kinds of medals when the Army said goodbye. . . . And George, who flew for fun before the war, and then found it was no fun pushing a bomber over Singapore flak—her George who was still good-looking, even with the forehead scar he brought home.

Al Rocklin came in, wiping his hands as he sat down. Ten civilians, Gloria thought with just a touch of bitterness, who couldn't be happy with anything removed from the sight and sound of airplane motors.

"Boys," George said from his chair, "we're up against it. When Tony's landing-gear folded under him at Atlanta, Saturday, it cost us three thousand dollars over the insurance."

The men were quiet. Distantly muted, a motor coughed harshly, then hummed into soft-powered life.

"We now have three flyable ships," George said as if he were reading a statement, "and a debt of eighty-six thousand dollars."

George let them think about it a moment while he filled a pipe.

"You all know what the situation is. We haven't got the contracts we should have. We're competing with air carriers who have been in the business a long time. They can show shippers schedules, facts and figures. That is something we haven't built up to yet."

"Tell us what the score is, Skipper," Al said. "Give it to us straight."

"We can take it one of two ways," George told them. "We can sell out, each man taking about a twenty-percent loss on his original investment or —we can try to meet the next note. If we can't meet it, they'll take our ships. . . .

"We'll put it to a vote, but first, we ought to have a little discussion."

HARRY WEINTRAUB put his hand in the air and followed it up himself a second later.

"As a stockholder, I want to make a speech before any discussion, and my speech is that we don't need any discussion," the Bronx boy stated.

"We're in this business 'cause we don't want to be in any other business —we're stupid, that's why, but we like it. I make a motion we go right on flying freight—providing we get some freight. A show of paws, gentlemen?"

Ten hands went up.

"Motion carried," Harry made it official, and sat down beaming.

"Proceedings irregular but unanimous," George smiled. "Okay, boys. There's one light in the wilderness. I have an appointment with McElroy at National Express this afternoon. He'll have to break down sometime, and this might be it. Any questions? Meeting adjourned."

Gloria sat back in the leather seat beside George as he kept the sedan close to the white line curling along the Holland tunnel.

Tires whispered on the concrete, echoed back from the spinning walls.

"George, have you talked to Larry Tallman recently?"

She said it casually, but he knew just what she was thinking.

"He called Tuesday. The job's mine if I want it—this week."

Illustrated by Arthur Harper

Road *to* Denver

They were under the river, tunnel lights curving toward them, past them.

"Do you see it my way, honey?" George asked softly. "Pushing an airliner around means security, and a nice flashy uniform. No more trouble trying to make Sky-Way click. We could get married—and then start saving cash for the day when a doctor pounds my chest and says I'm through. Then, maybe, I'd get a desk job, and maybe I wouldn't. . . .

"Even if I wanted that, there are nine other guys to think about. I could make a long heroic speech, but it just boils down to the three years some of us sweated out together."

"I know, George." She sat close to him. "I guess I'd like you less if you walked out."

He put an arm around her, withdrawing it just as swiftly when daylight of the Manhattan exit swelled up in the distance.

George braked up to the curb at Canal and Broadway.

"Grab us a table at Mike's," he ordered. "I'll be there at five."

Gloria nodded, and blew him a kiss as she got out. George watched her high heels patter down the pavement, and after a moment or so realized that he was occupying a bus stop, and a bus behind him was announcing that fact with indignant horn. He pulled out into the uptown traffic. . . .

The young and dramatically alluring receptionist at National Express called in his name and then sat staring at him as if he had three ears.

Those gray hairs came with the war, kiddo, George felt like saying. *I'm still*

a child prodigy at thirty-two. But he didn't say anything. He knew she was looking at the scar that decorated his forehead; people usually did. Gloria hadn't said anything when he had come back; she had just held him tight. Sometimes, he still had a bad night about it. He'd keep trying to bring the '17 out of the spin, but the blood sludged over his eyes, and he kept yelling for Les, only Les was doubled up in the co-pilot's seat with three slugs in him. . . .

McElroy came out personally and took him into the walnut-paneled office. George sat in one of the big leather chairs by a window and looked out over a skyscraper panorama as seen from thirty floors up.

"Well, George, how's Sky-Way doing?" McElroy leaned back in his swivel chair and carefully removed the end of a black cigar.

"We could do with a lot more business than we have," George admitted.

"I've told you how it is," McElroy explained. "I'd like to give you freight, but it isn't only up to me. If I don't use one of the established lines, I have to have a damn' good reason; and frankly, George, I haven't got one."

"I've heard that story, Mac," George sighed. "How can we prove we can deliver if we don't get the opportunity?"

McElroy lit his smoke.

"George, can you make Denver in twelve hours?"

"It's possible."

"If you can do it, I have a job for you."

"We can do it."

"I'll give it to you aboveboard, George." McElroy took the cigar out of his mouth and put his hands behind his head. "We'll have a shipment that must leave Newark at six tomorrow morning. It must reach Denver by six tomorrow night—no later. If it's later, we won't even accept delivery, and it'll be in the contract that way."

"What are we carrying?"

"Hybrid flowers out of a New Jersey greenhouse, and they'll need attention within a thirteen-hour period. Denver in twelve hours or no sale, George. Can you do it?"

"I said we could do it." George picked up his hat. "I'll have Steve Miller pick up that contract this evening. He'll coördinate delivery to the airport."

George stopped at the door. "Thanks, Mac."

McElroy waved a hand without looking up from the papers on his desk.

MIKE was as broad as he was tall; and when he smiled, there was a thousand years of Corsican sunshine in the dark wrinkles of the pudgy face.

"*Pizza,* good and hot," the little man advertised as he slid the big platter down on the checkered-cloth table. "And just on time, huh?"

"Your pie's on time, Mike," Gloria agreed, "but George isn't."

"Isn't what?" George stooped into the booth, spread a napkin on his lap, picked up a fork and looked innocent.

"I was thinking that maybe McElroy ate you for one of his business lunches."

"Better than that," George grinned. "He gave us some freight."

"No!"

He told her all about it.

THEY topped off the *pizza* with a glass of beer. George lit cigarettes for both of them, and they sat there looking at each other. The mechanical orchestra near the bar whirred a few times, and a soft-voiced thrush started to sing something about a paper moon.

"Gloria, George—"

They looked up at the neat young man standing by their table.

"Hello, Larry, join our little celebration," George invited.

Tallman pulled over a chair, smiled at Gloria.

"I've been on Gloria's blacklist," he confided to George, "ever since I tried to steal her while you were backboning the AAF. Can you think of a better opportunity?"

"No," George admitted easily. Nobody but Larry could talk like that. Tallman had been around a long time, and people knew one thing; he was honest; he let people know what he wanted—before he went out and got it.

"I'll bet the price of the next beer I can call your happy event," Tallman stated.

"You've got a bet," Gloria agreed.

"National came through."

"It was a bad bet, honey," George reminded her. "Larry knows everything that happens or is going to happen to aviation. That's why Trans-American has him hanging around as general manager."

"I also know what you're in for, George." Larry Tallman was serious. "That shipment of weeds has gone out twice already with big carriers, and it has never paid off. They couldn't make the schedule. Twelve hours doesn't give you any leeway. You've got to climb out of Newark and home on Denver, and there are a hundred reasons why you're going to be late—"

"I know, Larry," George nodded, "but this is Sky-Way's chance to show off, and we're going to do it."

"If you had any sense in that Army-thickened skull, George, you'd work for us. At least, we don't send our liners up into weather. And George," —Tallman paused—"have you checked tomorrow's weather yet?"

"Calling the office now." George got up. "Keep my baby amused for a while."

He had to wait a moment for the connection. The juke-box strains seeped into the booth. Dishes clattered in the kitchen.

Charley Clyde answered the phone.

"What's in the forecast, Charley?"

"We don't need the forecasts, old boy," Charley said slowly. "I've got the west weather sequences in my hand. There's a cold passage over the Rockies now, George. There's a line squall ahead of it, moving east. You know what that means, George?"

George knew what it meant. Two thousand miles away, an air mass had turned over and gone crazy; a cold front was laying a dark, top-heavy overcast of clouds across three States; and ahead of it, a terror line of thunderstorms twisted and ran with the strength of the pressure of the universe feeding it.

"I'll be over by four this morning," George said; "and Charley, get some sleep. You're co-pilot this trip."

"Thanks," Charley said pleasantly; "thanks for nothing."

George slapped the phone back on its cradle and opened the booth door. Fresh air rushed in along with the plantive tones of the thrush who was still singing about a paper moon.

FOG pressed against the office windows, gray, glittering with the early morning light behind it.

George leaned against the desk, watching the dial face of the wall clock. It said five-forty. Gloria was sitting very quietly in her corner.

"Did you file the flight-plan?" George asked.

Charley nodded. "Tower will give us the clearance."

Charley was building a pyramid of matches in the ashtray. He sat back, inspected the balance with satisfaction, and got up.

"I'll start engines at fifty." He walked out, closing the door carefully behind him. The match heap collapsed.

"George, I don't know why, but I'm worried."

Gloria was tired. He could see the weariness in her eyes. He could see more than that: She was young; she was sweet; and she was everything he had fought for overseas and was fighting for now. It seemed to George that he had been very stupid about many things.

"There's something about this flight that scares me—I'm foolish, I guess." She tried to smile, but it didn't come off very well.

George reached for her hands, and pulling her up to him, held her tight.

"No, honey, you're so much wiser than I—" He knew there were tears in her eyes, and it hurt.

"Brace yourself," George said, his voice queer in the close cabin; "we're going in."

"This trip makes no difference, one way or another. As soon as I get back, we're going to invest two dollars at City Hall—even if I have to sell the '47 to do it."

He knew she'd laugh at that, and she was smiling as he looked at her.

Outside the office windows, motors turned over, stuttered, then blasted.

"Stay inside, honey," he requested.

She nodded, and he kissed her slowly. He scooped up his cap. It had been with him a long time—blood-stains still on the visor. He opened the door and looked back.

"Reserve us a table for tomorrow night at six, honey," he grinned, "and tell Mike we want something special."

HE slid into his seat, plugged in his earphones, scanned the glowing panel board in front of him. The plane was vibrating with the power of its spinning blades.

"Check sheet okay," Charley told him, relaxing comfortably on his co-pilot's cushion.

George picked up his microphone.

"Tower, from Sky-Way Two," he called, *"we're ready to go."*

"Sky-Way Two," the voice came strong in the phones, *"New York Air-way Traffic Control clears you to the Denver Airport, to cruise at eight thousand. Report to Allentown, Wil-liamsport and Philipsburg radios in passing; make all other radio com-munication contacts en route. . . .*

"Wind is west, three miles; you are cleared to taxi. Use north-south run-way. Over."

"Roger on the ATC clearance." George waved at the ground crew, waited a moment for them to move the chocks, and then advanced his throttle slowly.

They rolled down the taxi strip, turning at the runway intersection, smoothly down to the end of the long pavement. There were patches of fog on the field, but the eastern sky was clear and brightening with the light of the sun still below the horizon.

"You are cleared to take off," the tower instructions came crisply. *"Make a right turn out."*

They were gliding on the concrete, the long hangar line flowing past them, light sparkling a moment on the tower windows. The motors roared at the touch of the throttle, and the distant depth of the runway rushed up, spun under them until it was a racing stream of white sinking away.

George gently brought back his wheel, and the horizon suddenly fell back below them as they climbed into the morning sky.

"Your time off," the tower voice re-cited in the phones, *"six, on the hour."*

ACROSS clear sky they followed the Allentown range, the steady beat in their earphones an unnecessary guide as they droned over farm squares and road ribbons, pilotage landmarks spread in neat, distant patterns below them.

George reported position to Wil-liamsport and switched his receiver over to the Philipsburg range. He glanced at his wrist-watch, calculated the air-speed, distance and time, with motors pulsing in constant back-ground as he figured. On time, on course, George thought. Cleveland next, then the long haul down to Denver.

The face of the sky was changing as they passed over the arc of the earth. A thin veil of cirrus shadowed the out-line of the sun, tainting the light with a dull, ominous glow. Below them were rippled rows of stratus, and above, the telltale forerunners of the frontal passage, cumulus clouds, bulg-

"Things would be fine—" Charley took a deep breath, "—if we knew where we were!"

ing balloons heavy with moisture, twisting in the air-streams that run before a pressure area.

"Cleveland Radio," George called into his microphone, *"this is Sky-Way Two, over."*

"Sky-Way, this is Cleveland Radio, over."

"We are over Parkman at '26, eight thousand feet," George reported, *"flying airways to Denver, over."*

"Roger, Sky-Way Two." There was static in their phones now, surging atmospherics stuttering over the ground voice. *"For your information, a squall line is estimated six zero miles west of Cleveland. Suggest change of route. Over."*

George looked at Charley a moment before he pressed his transmitter button.

"Roger, Cleveland," he said briefly, *"we are continuing in accordance with our flight plan. Sky-Way Two out."*

The bottom cloud sheet was solid over Cleveland, and George turned up the volume of the radio receiver; the beat of the Cleveland range came through louder, reassuring.

Lightning ripped across the sky, a neon-white blaze linking cloud and ground. It was vertical, George noticed; vertical lightning meant turbulence. The thunder came hoarsely, volleying in the sky basin.

"There she is," Charley said casually.

Thirty miles in front of them, a ridge of cloud-banks hid the horizon of earth and sky. Centered and fronting the squall line, the black clouds of the thunderstorm towered up into the visible limits of the heavens.

Fifty miles wide, George estimated, and maybe a hundred miles in depth. From their distance, the formation stood out in detail; the patches of dark cumulus with their cauliflower edges mounted up in layers to thirty thousand feet, and above them, the cirrus mushroomed out into the ice-flaked air like an anvil top. At the base of the monster, the roll cloud twisted like a bale of dirty cotton in the grip of the pressure streams.

THIS was the time to turn around and go home. George smiled grimly. Smarter pilots than he had done that—and lived to talk about thunderstorms. But they were running out of time; it had to be straight through. . . .

"Brace yourself," George said, his voice queer in the close cabin; "we're going in."

He pulled back on the wheel, his eye on the bank indicator as he touched right rudder. Wisps of cloud fragments swept past them as they climbed. He needed altitude; the altimeter needle swung around the dial as he held the nose up. Air-speed began to drop, and he advanced throttle a little.

Charley was studying the chart.

"Mountains at fifteen hundred," he announced.

They were aside of the thunderhead, pounding through the cloud curtain that ringed the main body of the storm. The moist fog particles steam-coated the glass.

George touched left rudder, and they turned, swinging in the arc of their climb; and then they were stabbing in through the cumulus walls of the storm funnel. Lightning streaked across the glass in a blinding zigzag of fire; thunder exploded under them.

Steady, George thought, eyes on the compass—but the compass was seesawing wildly. He turned to the ball indicator. This was no place to get lost. . . .

They were riding rough air. Where were the downdrafts, George wondered, and then he glanced at the altimeter. The needle was swinging back around the dial, running down altitude in hundreds of feet, and he

could feel it now, the sting of the pressure change.

Charley was holding the wheel with him; both of them were straining to keep the nose up.

George threw full throttle, and the engines raced with the power of the pumping pistons. The altimeter needle hesitated, then slowly resumed its spin. The pin touched 4000, passed it. Mountains at 1500! George sat there thinking about the mountains and about Gloria, knowing he had done everything that could be done. The needle clicked past 3000.

They were going forward as fast as they were going down. The plane bucked, shook, quivered in the fist of the air-streams. The needle stopped, slowly reversed direction, then suddenly spun backward, spinning back around the dial in exact ratio to the pressure of the updrafts that hurled them back into the sky.

George pushed his wheel forward, and eased the throttle back. The fog thinned in front of them as they tore out of the thunderhead.

HEAVY rain sluiced against the glass, and cloud-layers shrouded the sun above and earth below.

"Well, things would be fine—" Charley took a deep breath, "—if we knew where we were!"

George knew what he meant. There was no sound but the flicker of static in their earphones. They had lost the range.

"I'll try Toledo." George spun the dial; there was nothing below the storm noise. He swung the dial to the Detroit frequency—nothing.

They sat there silently as the motors pulled them across the sky. They were heading west—if the compass was right; they were at eight thousand feet—if the altimeter was still correct; that much they knew.

The minutes dragged themselves around the clock face, methodically, tortuously building into hours.

George was suddenly very tired, and it was more than a physical reaction. It was mental weariness, a bitter-tasting hopelessness.

They were through. There was nothing more that human mind and muscle could do. George leaned back against the cushion, listening to the water scrape at the glass, the steady patter whispering over the engine fire.

They were flyers, George told himself; they were heroes. They were supposed to do something, pull a neat trick out of their bag—come down with some spectacular gesture.

But you can't come down through an overcast, not when you're lost. You can't do that when there's air traffic pounding blind below you, not when you're sitting over mountain peaks, maybe. You had to stay up in your lonesome sky, watching your clock and the gas-needle, thinking of the mountain graves and the river graves of airmen who found they couldn't be heroes any more.

The loneliness was the worst part, George thought. They were a tiny fragment of life flashing across the sky dome, isolated from man and earth by fog and rain, and the thundering static of atmospherics.

Charley spun the radio dial—and somewhere beneath the nervous, surging static, for a brief second, there seemed to be something . . . . The phantom sound faded, built up again.

Then the faint, modulated signal came through—storm-broken, erratic, but in steady singsong cadence.

"It's Denver," Charley pronounced casually, without turning around. George nodded. They had caught a small piece of the Denver range—not the on-course, far from it. They were somewhere in one of the wide quadrants of the Denver range pattern. George raised his microphone.

"Denver Radio," he called, *"this is Sky-Way Two. Over."*

They listened, but there was no answer within the static.

"Denver Radio, Denver Radio," George tried again, *"this is Sky-Way Two, give a long call, give us a long call. Over."*

There was nothing. They were sky-bound, surrounded by the hopeless weather curtain.

The metallic voice came through suddenly, faint but clear over the pulse of the Denver range:

"Sky-Way Two, Sky-Way Two, this is Denver Radio, how do you hear us? Over."

An electrical wave leaping between earth and sky linked them to a man sitting before a radio board in a communication station, and in that second, the sky curtain burst wide open.

"Denver, from Sky-Way Two," George called, *"we read you okay now. We are at eight thousand feet, on instruments, position unknown. We hear a light A from your range. We are en route Denver Airport. Over."*

"Roger, Sky-Way Two," the brisk answer came back. *"We will try to get a bearing on you. Start continuous transmission. Over."*

Charley took over the microphone.

"Mary had a little lamb," he recited undramatically. *"Her fleece was white as snow—the lamb's, that is. This is Sky-Way Two broadcasting on three-one-zero-five kilocycles. . . . Stay tuned to this station for further developments—"*

"Sky-Way Two, this is Denver Radio," The call was louder over the static now. *"Your approximate position is over Roderick. Fly true north until you intercept the northeast leg of the Denver range. Upon crossing the leg, ATC clears you for a procedure turn and immediate descent to 1500 feet. Report to the tower as soon as you are contact. Over."*

"Roger, Denver."

George pressed left rudder, watching the compass point as the plane swung around.

"Five-thirty," Charley commented. George didn't say anything. There was nothing to be said. You could advance throttle just so much; then you had to sit and wait while air-speed ate time.

The sky wasn't empty now. It was filled with the singing sound of the Denver range building in volume within their earphones until the tones merged into one solid on-course signal.

George started the procedure turn. The panel clock read 5:45 as he pushed his wheel forward. They sank down through the overcast, roaring down blind through the tail of the frontal passage. The beam pulsed strongly in the earphones as they rode down the sky on the Denver range.

"Maybe we'll get immediate clearance," Charley hoped out loud.

George watched the altimeter needle ring down altitude. At four thousand, the cloud film was lighter against the glass, thinning fast as they drove down through it. At twenty-one hundred, they broke out of the overcast, the earth in faint outline below.

"Denver Tower, this is Sky-Way Two," George called, *"we are over Stapleton at two thousand feet—contact. Over."*

"Roger, Sky-Way Two," the voice snapped inside the phones. *"No traffic, you are cleared for a straight-in approach."*

George put his wheels down. He didn't look at the clock. The field was ahead of them, rising up to them as they sank toward the long strip of pavement. He cut throttle, let the ship drop gently—the wheels touched and bounced.

"Your time on—" the tower broadcast, *"5:51."*

GEORGE turned at the runway intersection, taxied toward the hangar. There were trucks waiting for them. He cut the engines, sat there feeling the sudden silence.

"I could learn to hate flowers," Charley decided thoughtfully.

"I'm going to have them all over the whole place," George said slowly. "Stacks of flowers in every corner."

"Where is this?"

"At my wedding, Charles," George grinned as he slid from the seat. "At my wedding, old boy—as soon as we pick up some freight and fly ourselves home."

There was a truck backed against the loading-ramp, and as they watched, the cases started coming out. The rain was mist now, and the air was sweet—much, George was thinking, like the scent of blossoms.

The Poet and the

MONSIEUR FRANCOIS VILLON, Master of Arts, and oft-times thief, lay late abed, watching the golden sunshine pour over the rooftops of Paris. Below, he could hear Father Guillaume Villon moving about the kitchen; and outside, children ran about with the particular hilarious madness with which young animals are endowed.

He stretched luxuriously, conscious of the bulge beneath his pillow. That bulge represented good honest labor, the prodigality of Charles VII, by Grace of God, the King of all France. Good hard gold-pieces were there, a tidy sum, given as a sign of the King's pleasure at the reformation of the poet-thief. Soon, when the contests were over, and François Villon had been acclaimed the finest poet of the day, there would be more gold and more prestige, and the doors of Paris' finest houses would open wide at his knock.

He liked the thought, for times had been hard; even thievery had not produced as well as in the past, and only the generous patronage of the Duc d'Orleans had kept his stomach from flattening against his spine.

He moved restlessly, conscious of hunger. His arrival at the bed which Father Guillaume kept for him had been late; the Lady Marie had been most feminine and charming, and to have slighted any charm would have been most foolish.

François Villon's laughter sounded softly in the room, lean fingers moving in restless thought. Dark eyes came alight above his bold thrusting nose, and he threw back the single coverlet, permitting the soft breeze to touch his nude body. Memories came and went, and always in them were soft lips and rounded curves and brown eyes flecked with gold. His planning had been bold and cunning, as a truand's must be in moskeneering; and now the swag lay close at hand, greater even than he had planned.

Courevant would not like it; but then, Monsieur Cosin de Courevant would never know, for these affairs of the poet-rogue had a grand finesse about them now, sadly lacking in his youth. Courevant's protegée would never win the poet's reward now, for Lady Marie could twist her husband's decisions about in her slim hands like a fold of silk. With her aid, and with his new-found reputation, François Villon would receive the recognition so long delayed. For luckily, Marie had the ear of Charles VII.

Villon treasured the thought. There was a devil in him, that he knew; and his poetry snarled where others' sang; it roared where others' whispered; it was bold and vital and sometimes ugly. And because he wrote of life in truth, honors had passed him by. Despite the patronage of Charles, Duc d'Orleans, his talents had been dismissed by those whose quills wrote in stately vein. And Cosin de Courevant had led the detractors, hating Villon with the passion of old age for youth, thwarted and frustrated in his own zeal to be known as France's finest poet.

But now, with Lady Marie's help, François Villon would come into his own. Charles VII would personally proclaim the poet-rogue's talents the finest in the land. He had but to be there, to receive the award; that was the only condition.

The thought brought mocking laughter to Villon; far better it would have been for de Courevant to have remained with the law, judging cases and reciting torts, instead of accepting the King's bounty as Master of the Books. Perhaps in that way he might have saved his efforts and his wife.

VILLON dressed. The clothes were good—blue velvet and silk blouse and polished leather. Three jewels were in the hilt of his dagger, and he touched it familiarly, before retrieving the purse from beneath the pillow. He was turning toward the door, when a stone flew through the window and rattled loosely on the floor.

"François, François?" a voice called softly from without, and he bent from the window, squinting in the sunlight.

"Go away, Jehan," he said in morning irritation. "If Father Guillaume spies you, there will be trouble."

"There is already trouble," the man in the yard said. "Gerard has been taken by the Watch."

"The—" Villon swore softly.

He knew Gerard; they had been friends. Gerard was but a boy, creeping into manhood, his face still unshaven and pink with the flush of the disease which gnawed at his lungs. Even now, he should have been far from Paris, going toward the highlands, where a physician had told him his lungs might heal.

A knocking on the door echoed his

"How?" Villon said, conscious that the talk might be overheard.

"It was Pierre; he was taken for counterfeiting, and during torture he told of the robbing of the Duck and Goose. Pierre is dead, of course; but Gerard is in prison, waiting sentence when court is held."

François Villon shook his head. He knew what a prison term would mean

Prisoner

AN ADVENTURE OF FRANÇOIS VILLON—A GREAT RASCAL, A GREAT POET, A GREAT LOVER AND A GREAT GENTLEMAN.

by WILBUR S. PEACOCK

words. "I thought you said the maid would warn us," François whispered.

for the boy. He would cough his lungs out some night, for the prisons of France were muck-holes of damp and filth and neglect. For his crime, he would receive not a sentence of a few months, but rather one of a grave headed by a slab of wood.

François Villon went through the window and down the vines which hugged the wall. So many years had he done the trick, that he gave it but a fleeting thought. Then, standing on the ground, he gestured with his thumb and followed the other through the gate into the street.

He marveled, as he always did, at the man ahead. Barely the size of a half-grown boy, his face as guileless as that of a child, Jehan was as formidable a man as François had ever met. A member of the *Coquille,* or Thieves Guild, the midget ranked only below Bagot, who was in command. He looked around now and smiled, and Villon grinned; there was mutual liking and respect in both, for they were of a mind, freebooters and dangerous, each in his own way, but of a sameness.

The street was crowded, mummers aping at a corner, the crowd jeering each performer. A fat priest waddled by, followed by two acolytes. A pail of slop splattered the street, and a hawker cursed the housewife, who cursed back indignantly. A dog slouched along, bold eyes searching for

Even as de Courevant's sword-cane slid beneath the hangings, he muscled himself from the floor, hanging like a bat.

a bit of plunder. Tall gabled houses reared against the sky, fronts sculptured with fantastic shapes, warriors and animals and scenes of battle.

François Villon breathed deeply. This was Paris, the most wonderful city in the world. It stank and it laughed; it sprawled, and yet it was close knit. Hunger sat with plenty, and death was no stranger. It had nurtured him on scavengings and swelled him with rich food and brilliant wines. He would not have traded its dirtiest corner for all the rest of the universe.

He followed Jehan into the shop of Bagot. There were no customers, and the foxy-faced clerk gave no heed as they went into a rear room and closed the door. A lifted trapdoor gave onto a ladder, and the ladder ended at a tunnel. Jehan lit a smoky torch, and they walked with hurried pace. For fifteen minutes the echoes of the steps were their only companions. Water dripped from the walls, and a thin trickle of sewage slid sinuously over their feet. Then ahead light flickered, and a few minutes later they came to the great cavern which was the headquarters of the *Coquille*.

The Thieves Guild swarmed with life. The air was dank and stale; torches flickering yellowly on the walls of the cavern. The smell of the catacombs was here, and the motley throng was like something from a drunkard's nightmares. Crippled beggars became whole again, unstrapped legs and arms coming free and being massaged back into life. Bagot's men sat at tables, taking their percentage of the day's gleaning from each cutpurse and truand and crimp, entering each account with neat precise figures, and then turning to the next to report. Bagot had brought thievery to a science, and his genius had made the *Coquille* into the most feared crime kingdom in the world.

Bagot sat now at his table. Grease dripped from his fingers as he ate. The sight brought a smile to Villon's sharp features; it seemed he could never remember a time when the shaven-headed giant was not eating or drinking. Wenching, eating, drinking or stealing, Bagot did them all in great quantities, for his lusts were great, in keeping with his huge body.

"Villon!" he called across the hall, and kicked a stool into place beside him at the table.

The poet-rogue waved negligently, bold eyes running about the room, his smile touching friends who waved in return. None came near the table, for this was Bagot's throne, and none dared approach without permission.

"Now aren't you the dandy!" Bagot said, grinning. "By all the saints, if I saw you in an alley, I'd pluck you like a goose."

"This goose has teeth," Villon said, and touched his dagger.

"I know," Bagot said, and smiled in remembrance. "Wine?" he finished.

Villon nodded, and sank to the stool. He unstoppered a bottle, tilting it to his mouth. It was good wine, as it should have been, considering whose cellar it had graced not too many nights before.

"What's all this about Gerard?" he said at last, and laid the bottle aside.

"The squeezer nipped him this morning," Bagot said, and there was fury in his face. "I'm for storming the prison and breaking him out."

François Villon stared, shocked by the bitterness in the older man's voice. "Good Lord, man," he said, "you couldn't do that! The King would dance all of us on Montfauçon air."

Jehan, the midget, swung lithely to the table-top, dangling his short-muscled legs over the side, and reaching for Villon's bottle. His child's face swung from man to man, then came to rest on Bagot.

"What of the guards?" he asked. "Are not their palms as itchy as always?"

Bagot scratched his shadowed head. "I've tried," he said; "but for once, the gaolers are afraid. This new Provost is hanging men out of hand for taking bribes. There'll be no salting until the Provost's term runs out, and that's three months away." His huge fist smashed the table. "Saint Michael, we cannot wait that long!"

Villon frowned. Things had come to a pretty pass when guards could not be bribed. It was hard to remember the time when prisoners, except those convicted of political crimes, could not be loosed by playing to the venality of brutal men.

"Well, what am I supposed to do?" he asked. "Jehan brought me here, pulling me from my bed. I am no miracle-worker; if you cannot get him out, then surely such a thing cannot be expected of me."

Bagot's expression softened. He was a hard man, a brutal one in some ways; yet François Villon could sway him as a breeze moves a tree. His respect for the poet-rogue came from somewhere deep within, a respect for the true talents which were so veneered with the brittle shell of Villon's existence.

"I hoped that you might help," he said simply. "You move in Court circles."

François Villon winced inwardly. There was a strangeness about the situation upon which he could not put the finger of his thoughts. Bagot protected his men, but hardly to this extent. And looking back, he remembered the solicitude and attention the huge man had always given the slight lung-diseased Gerard.

"The Duc d' Orleans is at Blois," he said at last, "but he plans a trip. I could not reach him in time to help, even if he were so inclined. And I have no ears at Court now, other than a few who could not bring influence to bear. I'm sorry, Bagot, but I can do nothing."

Jehan was stropping a knife along the side of a diminutive boot. His brows were knitted with concentration, and his voice was almost a whisper.

"My knife might cut a path," he said.

"No!" Villon leaned forward. "I warn you again that any violence will bring the King to fury. His men would hunt us down like rats."

Bagot shrugged, strain in the line of his broad shoulders. "Then what do you suggest?" he asked.

Villon reached for the wine again, thoughts spinning in his brain like the trail of Chinese fire-rockets. Futility racked him, and his tight lips made his nose even bolder and more predatory.

"Gerard will be convicted?" he said.

Bagot nodded. "Pierre talked before he died. The judge can do nothing but sentence him. He cannot even plead mistaken identity."

"Mistak—" François Villon caught his breath, the first glimmering of an idea swirling into his mind.

"François," Bagot said, "you are like a younger brother to me; I trust you; that you know. Free Gerard from prison, and there's nothing I have that is not yours. I swear it."

At sound of Bagot's voice, even Jehan stopped his whetting of the knife. Never before had Villon heard the great man plead; never had he thought to hear such a thing. His eyes went to Bagot's face, seeing the strain and depth of feeling. He saw the expression in Bagot's eyes, and suddenly understanding came to him, full and complete.

"Then Gerard is—" he began, and Bagot cut him short.

"—my son," the huge thief said. "He doesn't know it; none knows it but you two. I had not meant to tell, but since I must, I must. His mother died a year ago, and so I tried to teach him what I know. He could be a good thief, even as I am, but that is not what he wants."

Pride came to Bagot then, deep hungering pride which he could not conceal. His hands were still, and his huge chest drew deep breaths.

"He wants to study, to be a man of learning," he said. "I have arranged that for him; a priest is to take him in hand and see that he studies, all expenses to be paid by me in the name of his father, who he thinks is dead.

"I'm not ashamed of being a thief, for I am a good thief, and I thought that such was good enough for my son. But now, knowing what he wants, then that is what I want him to have. Villon, I implore you, find a way of freeing him. With rest and a surgeon's help, he can live. He can be a man of learning, a credit to himself."

BAGOT'S voice stilled; he stared at the poet-rogue, ashamed of his outburst, yet defiant at the same time. Villon looked away, shaken by the dreadful urgency in the man, understanding now many unasked questions.

The idea still hung expectantly in his mind, and he toyed with it for a moment, bringing it to full flower. Within seconds, he had the pattern, and a smile touched his mouth.

"There is a way," he said at last.

"What?" Bagot leaned forward, his hands fists now, eyes intent.

"Can a bribe be given at all?"

"In some ways, yes."

"Then perhaps this might work: Bribe the guards to free Gerard, and leave another man in his place. When trial is called, this substitute can prove an alibi for the night of the robbery,

indeed prove he is an altogether different man. The judge can do nothing other than free him."

Jehan laughed softly. "By the gods," he said, "it might work!" He looked at Bagot. "The Watch and the gaolers are not friends; it will furnish a laugh for the gaolers if the Watch is cursed for arresting the wrong man."

Bagot frowned, turning the idea over in his mind. And at last a faint smile of approval touched his eyes.

"We'll make it work," he said, "and damn the cost." His gaze ran speculatively about the room. "But who will play the part? He must look a great deal like Gerard!"

VILLON searched the room. Men were there, dozens of men. "Antoine," he said, "or Cayeux or Casin."

Jehan shook his head. "I know for a fact they have no alibis for that night."

Villon nodded. Luckily, he himself had not gone on that robbery, giving it up at the last moment for a rendezvous with Lady Marie. If he had gone, he might even now be sharing a cell with Gerard.

"François," Bagot said.

"Huh!" Villon grunted an answer, turning; and then, seeing the answer in the big man's eyes, he shook his head violently. "Oh, no," he said harshly. "It is my plan but not my doing."

"You look alike," Bagot persisted. "Same features and same build; you could almost pass for brothers."

"Look," the poet-rogue said earnestly, "there is to be a King's award in three days, and I propose to be there and win it. If anything should go wrong, well—" He spread strong hands. "No, the task is not for me."

"The trial is tomorrow morning," Bagot persisted. "You would be free by noon."

"No!" François Villon stood.

"You have an alibi?" Jehan asked suddenly.

"Well, yes, but—"

"François," Bagot leaned forward. "I have never asked much of you, but I am pleading now. Help free my son."

Villon swung his head from man to man, estimating and evaluating the entire situation. If anything went wrong, if he had to stay in prison for more than a couple of days, all of his plans for the future would be for naught.

He had worked for this award, dishonestly, that is true, but a court is built of intrigues, and awards come to him who plans the cleverest schemes. This was to be the end of thieving; this was but the beginning of a life where fine clothes and rich foods and heavy purses were the accepted things.

"Make but one mistake, Master Poet, and your clothes will gather dust no longer."

He could find no fault in his plans; he admitted that. No judge could convict an innocent man, at least not in this particular case. His alibi was perfect, for he had spent the night with Lady Marie—Cosin de Courevant being out of Paris on the King's business. The alibi Lady Marie would give him would be confidential to the judge alone, and so would not be bruited about the court. Yes, the scheme was foolproof.

A devil danced in his eyes, the flame of adventure coursing in his veins. He laughed softly, feeling the tinge of excitement. This was part of his life, doing things which normal sober-thinking people could not conceive of doing. It tickled the fancies of his mind, and he was nodding as he looked again at Bagot.

"I'll do it," he said. "But you have a share to do also."

"I'll do mine," Bagot said, and his hand touched Villon's in silent thanks.

"Come," Jehan said practically, "we must make foolproof plans."

They were smiling then, bent forward conspiratorially; and François Villon began to talk, laying thought upon thought like a mason placing bricks. And later, when he was through, he swung from the table.

"Where now?" Bagot asked.

"To check my alibi," the poet-rogue said gently. "I shall meet you here at midnight."

He was whistling as he strode toward the tunnel, whistling and confident. He swaggered as he walked, and a ballade began building in his mind. It rushed and swooped like a river gone mad with spring rains. It sang and whispered, and he was strangely content. He waved good-by at the entrance to the tunnel, and then he smiled. Bagot was eating again.

MARIE DE COUREVANT wore a gown of velvet and satin tonight, low in cut and richly revealing. Jewels glittered on her hand and wrist, and a lavalière lay in the warm hollow of her breasts. Mademoiselle Sorel had but lately introduced the custom to the court of Charles VII; yet even she could not hold attention of the men when Lady Marie was about.

"It is like a story from a book," Marie said now, and touched François Villon's arm.

François laughed, lifting the wine into the light and watching purple shadows flick over his fingers.

"A sordid one, at best," he admitted. "But I must repay this man for saving my life so many months ago."

He lied, of course; for by his code he could not tell the true circumstances. Bagot had confided in him, and confidences could not be taken lightly. Not that it mattered to Marie; to her it was a caper, a lark which excited her. There would be no danger to her, now or later, for a judge could not spread such information as he might hear in confidence. To do such a thing would bring swift retribution at the end of a rope.

"It's a noble thing you do, François," Marie said softly.

François Villon flushed, but held his tongue. He could feel the warmth of the girl at his side, and the subtlety of her perfume touched his senses. She was younger than he, the freshness of youth still in her voice and laughter. Like other marriages, hers had been one of convenience. Her dowry had been huge, wealth left by her father. And of course Cosin de Courevant had position at court. Although he was almost thrice her age, he had proposed, and so the marriage had taken place.

But it had been marriage in name only. He was like a food-surfeited dog with a bone, not wanting it himself, yet watchful that others did not steal it. His face was thin, his body attenuated, and the pale skin of his scalp shone unhealthily through hair

so thin it was almost nonexistent. Foppish in clothes, as though to regain the vain days of his youth, he had contrived to force Marie to dress plainly and in poor taste. But having a will of her own, she had done as she pleased, and he accepted her decision finally, knowing his authority could be carried only so far.

François Villon had given her youth and compliments, and the turn of his wit had titillated her amusement. Her kisses had been soft, and all the more sweet because they needs must be stolen at odd moments. That nothing could come of their affair, both knew; but both accepted the situation for what it was.

And now, sitting in the large room, she bent her head and kissed the lobe of his ear. He smiled and turned, holding her close. When at last she was free, her fair skin was flushed, and he could feel the thudding of his heart.

"At times you are a stranger to me, François," she said unevenly. "You're bold and daring, utterly unlike a man who could write such poetry as you do."

He laughed at the words, liking them, for they were flattering. He was a rogue—that he knew as well as she; yet he could pass in any company, good or bad, from the University or from the gutter. His wit was bold, and his poetry touched by a sense of dark sublimity. He was neither all good nor all bad; and if history were to take him, then it must be satisfied with him as he truly was.

"I only hope the King believes such things," he said, smiling.

A KNOCKING on the door echoed his words; and in the frozen instant of time after the knock, their eyes rapiered startled glances.

"Marie?" a heavy voice said. "It is I, Cosin."

François came loosely to his feet. "I thought you said the maid would warn us?" he whispered.

"The fool!" Marie answered. "She must have fallen asleep!"

François Villon turned, lifting the second glass and placing it in his pocket. "The back again," he whispered, and at her nod, he went across the room. "For a day or two, my love," he said, and gently lifted the latch.

"Marie, what is the delay?" Cosin de Courevant knocked again, impatiently this time.

François Villon opened the rear door slowly, and as slowly closed it. Grimness was in his mouth now, his dark eyes flashing about the room.

"What is it, François?" Marie whispered, held motionless by his scowl.

"It seems that Monsieur de Courevant has a man at the foot of the stairs."

Illustrated by John Fulton

"Where now can a man hide, that a sword-point cannot reach him out?"

"For the last time, are you going to open this door?" Cosin snapped.

François Villon turned slowly. This was the Devil's doings, conjured up at the last moment to confound Villon's plans. Damn that careless maid!

"Marie!" The latch rattled savagely, lock chattering as the door was forced by sudden weight.

"A moment, please," Marie cried.

Villon eliminated the two windows; they gave on to the street two floors below. There were no closets, and the only exits now had a man at each. He had no fear of violence, for he was as skilled with a short blade as with a long; yet he knew the danger he faced here was greater than any which might puncture his skin.

He saw the couch then, cloth hanging to the floor, safety waiting underneath. With a wry smile, he dropped to his knees, and winking, slid under the couch, the hangings dropping back into place. Within was the dimness of a cavern; high overhead, he could feel the slats against which the cushions rested.

"What kept you?" Cosin de Courevant said harshly from the door.

"A personal matter, sire," Marie said gently.

"Oh!" Silence fell for a brief second. "I thought you might be ill, what with the lamps still lit."

"No!"

François Villon lay silently, hearing the tread of the old man as it went from side to side in the room. The latch of the rear door rattled, and Villon knew a silent signal had passed between de Courevant and the guard stationed below.

"You are alone?" Cosin de Courevant said.

"Quite alone; why do you ask?"

"No reason." False anger came to the old man's voice. "This room has not been properly cleaned; see, dirt here, and here, and here."

François Villon loosened his dagger in its sheath. He knew this byplay. Within a second de Courevant would prove his point by sweeping aside the hangings on the couch and disclosing the dust beneath—and Villon along with it. With disclosure would come disaster, for de Courevant and his sword-cane were famous.

He could feel the perspiration sliding down his cheek, and his hand was damp on the knife-hilt.

"I shall tell the housekeeper tomorrow that you are not pleased."

Jehan tapped on the door with the hilt of one dagger, and the suspicious, fearful face of a guard peered forth. "Hurry!" he growled. "They're changing guard shifts now."

There was no fear in the girl's voice now; she was as poised as if this were but the most genteel of conversations.

"Do that," Cosin de Courevant said softly, dangerously. "And particularly call to her attention to have the space beneath such things as the couch cleaned."

François Villon tensed, catching his heels on the ledge at the far end of the couch frame. Reaching high, he caught the widest slat; and even as de Courevant's sword-cane slid beneath the hangings, he drew a soft breath and muscled himself from the floor, hanging like a bat from the roof of his miniature cave.

He felt the cane slide along his back, prodding the deep shadows. He heard de Courevant's grunt of annoyance, and then the hangings were back in place, the old man's footsteps going reluctantly toward the far door.

Villon lowered himself gently to the floor, smiling into the dimness. That was as close a call to desperate action as he had ever had. It amused him; it would make the basis of a clever ballade, naming no names, of course. He laughed softly to himself.

"Good night," Cosin de Courevant said gruffly.

"Good night, sire," Lady Marie said gently, and the latch rattled into place.

VILLON waited until he heard the rattle of carriage wheels in the street outside. Then he rolled from beneath the couch and stood, his eyes alight with the spirit of the moment.

"How?" Marie asked, and suddenly there was a tremor about her soft lips.

"Like a sloth, I hung," Villon said carelessly. "A hand's-breadth higher, and Cosin would have discovered me."

They laughed softly, relieved. Villon retrieved the wineglass from his pocket and placed it upon the table.

"I must go now," he said.

"Be careful," Marie warned.

He held her for a moment, then turned away. "I shall be careful," he agreed. "Nothing can go wrong, though."

He kissed the smooth warmth of her mouth, and then he was through the door, Lady Marie's personal maid a white-clad guide to show him to the street.

Outside, he shrugged his shoulders looseningly, drawing in a deep breath of fresh air. His head was light from the wine he had drunk, and the danger of the past moment had speeded his blood. He laughed aloud and went down the street.

At the corner he turned. There was a movement to one side, and Villon tensed, blade coming free in his hand with instinctive speed. Ahead, two horses moved restlessly in carriage harness, and a lantern suddenly flung a flood of light as a shade was drawn.

"Monsieur François Villon!" Cosin de Courevant said gently. "Not that it is so strange, our meeting thus, for I expected you would appear at about this moment."

Villon relaxed, his eyes growing accustomed to the glare of light. He could see the lean figure of de Courevant beside the carriage, and farther back, the heavier figure of the old man's bodyguard.

"Is it your custom to wait like a crimp on dark streets, sire?" he asked, mockery in his tone.

"At this time, yes," de Courevant answered. The lantern swung over Villon. "It seems that you are a bit dusty, monsieur; can it be you have fallen?"

Villon laughed softly, feeling the wave of hatred from the other man. He had no regrets; his conscience was in abeyance for the moment.

"Not fallen—hidden," he said softly. "Which is a riddle, don't you think? For where now can a man hide that a sword-point cannot reach him out?"

The lantern shook in de Courevant's sudden passion. "That I do not know," he whispered. "But this I do know; make one mistake, but one mistake, Master Poet, and your clothes will gather dust no longer."

François Villon backed slowly, until the wide street was all about. He

knew of flung knives and concerted attack.

"De Courevant," he said slowly, "your threats are as powerless as yourself."

He was laughing freely as he vanished into the night.

AT midnight the stars were lost in the blackness of the sky, and the moon was but a pale sliver of yellow high overhead. Few were on the street, for the honest were long since abed, candles and lanterns still of light. Taverns roared, heedless of the Watch, brown ale and pale wines bringing life to those of Paris to whom night was the day.

François Villon, passing the last tavern before reaching the prison, swallowed thoughtfully. There was time for a drink, if he chose to have one. Then he shrugged and went ahead, turning down the Rue de Valle and sighting Bagot's great silhouette ahead at the prison's gates.

"You're early," he said, ducking into a shadow.

Bagot grunted. "I saw no need to wait."

Jehan came away from the stone wall. Two knives were in his belt, and the smile on his child's mouth was matched by the coldness of his eyes.

"Enough talk," he said. "Let's get this over with."

"Ready?" Bagot asked.

"Any time," Villon answered.

Jehan tapped on the door with the hilt of one dagger, and a moment later light slid from a widening crack, the suspicious, fearful face of a guard peering forth.

"Hurry!" he growled. "They're changing guard shifts now."

The trio went through the door, following the guard down an unlit passageway, the light of the guide's torch running grotesque shadows about like blackened ghosts. The air was damp, stinking, as in all prisons; and from a side corridor came the moans of sick men whose only release would lie in death.

François Villon shivered. He had been in prisons before, Meun and Montfauçon and a few private ones of which he did not care to think. He had friends here, or at least, acquaintances; and he felt a stab of sympathy for them.

The tunnel turned, emptying into a block of single cells. Rats raced away from the light, standing in defiance at last, their eyes red-hot coals which never blinked. Noisome odors were here, and the air was foul and stale. All cells but one were empty. In that, his dirty hands clasped about huge bars, Gerard blinked in the sudden light.

"Get him out of there," Bagot said, and the rage in his voice was like the scaly coiling of a snake.

A key rattled in the lock, and then the young man was free, coughing into a dirty rag, supported by the heavy hand of the man he knew only as King of the *Coquille.*

Jehan turned from where he guarded the door. "Let's get out of here," he said. "If we're caught, there will be blood spilled."

François Villon nodded cheerfully. "Get the boy away," he said. "If he isn't far from Paris by time of the morning trial, he may be caught again."

Bagot looked up, and Villon felt his glance shift, embarrassment tiding into his heart at the naked gratitude in the gigantic thief's eyes. He wondered now that he had ever hesitated in the doing of such a small thing.

"Thanks, François," Bagot said.

"Enough of this talk," the guard muttered fearfully. "If I am caught, even gold will do me no good."

"I'll be free by noon," Villon said cheerfully. "Until then, good luck."

Leaning against the cell door, he watched the men leave. Gerard had said nothing, not even thanks; but that was to be expected; thanks among thieves were few and far between, and even so, he did not know that the rogue-poet was taking his place. Bagot had been fearful of telling him.

Then the torch was gone about a bend in the tunnel, and only the feeble flicker of a small lantern was left. Villon drew his cloak about his shoulders at the touch of the chill air, then caught up the lantern and examined the cell. It was no better or worse than any he had seen; it was but a prison cell.

He stretched on the bunk which some prisoner had made of blocks of stone and set the lantern on the floor. With his hands for a pillow, he watched a roach climb the walls, and his musings were pleasant and all-enveloping.

"Ten suits of clothes, rich braid and soft velvet and the finest of Chinese silks," he said aloud. "Then a home where the winds do not whistle through wall cracks in the winter. Next, a cellar full of the finest wines and foods, and the prettiest wench in all Paris to serve them.

"Ah, it will make up for all the years I've done without." He went on, embroidering fancy with fancy. "I shall write great poems, brilliant ballades, racing roundels. I shall—" His voice trailed away and he was asleep, the lantern burning dimly at his side.

IN the passing hours he moved but twice on the uncomfortable bunk; and it was midmorning when he came fully awake. He heard the morning sounds in the prison, and looking from the window of his cell, he could see into the central compound.

Prisoners milled in a motley throng, favored ones running the small shops spaced at regular intervals, shops where watered wine and fish and meat and bread could be bought by those whose pockets or friends kept them supplied with money. He shivered, remembering other times when he had been imprisoned in such places as this.

Then he smiled, remembering his alibi and knowing he would be free within hours. Even now, Lady Marie would be waiting in the small room outside of the court where secret witnesses stayed until testimony was needed. A few words from her, and he would be free, and damned to Cosin de Courevant, who watched her like the hungry old fool that he was.

He waited impatiently for the guard; and when the man appeared, he was ready to leave. His toilet consisted of brushing his hair with his hands and rinsing his mouth with water from the clay jug.

"Let's get on, man," he said.

"You're in a hurry to face a judge," the gaoler said. His gaze ran contemptuously over Villon's body. "Well, you won't be quite so gay when you return. Word comes that you'll be here for some months yet, and you're lucky that you aren't to be gallows-bait."

"Bah!" François Villon said, arrogant with confidence. He snapped lean fingers. "When the Most Honorable Justice of the Law, Réné Blan-

THE BALLAD OF DEAD LADIES

TELL me now in what hidden way is
Lady Flora the lovely Roman?
Where's Hipparchia, and where is Thais,
Neither of them the fairer woman?
Where is Echo, beheld of no man,
Only heard on river and mere,—
She whose beauty was more than human?
But where are the snows of yester-year?

Where's Héloise, the learned nun,
For whose sake Abeillard, I ween,
Lost manhood and put priesthood on?
(From Love he won such dule and teen!)
And where, I pray you, is the Queen
Who willed that Buridan should steer
Sewed in a sack's mouth down the Seine?
But where are the snows of yester-year?

White Queen Blanche, like a queen of lilies,
With a voice like any mermaiden,—
Bertha Broadfoot, Beatrice, Alice,
And Ermengarde the lady of Maine,—
And that good Joan whom Englishmen
At Rouen doomed and burned her there,—
Mother of God, where are they then?
But where are the snows of yester-year?

Nay, never ask this week, fair lord,
Where they are gone, nor yet this year,
Except with this for an overword,—
But where are the snows of yester-year?

chard, hears my story, I shall be free as a bird."

"Maybe!" The guard shrugged. "Come along, then."

He led the way from the noisome cells, along a side passage and finally thrust open a heavy wooden door.

Villon went through, running his eyes about the room. Spectators were standing at the rear; the prisoner's dock was empty. A man Villon knew instinctively to be the prosecutor was talking to the bewigged and black-gowned judge.

THERE was no ceremony; Villon was led to the dock, where he stood beneath the combined gazes of judge and prosecutor. He could have no barrister; there would be no jury. There would be but three of them, judge, prosecutor and himself, for such was the custom in minor trials such as this.

Villon swung his head and felt reassurance come to his mind. A guard was at the witnesses' door; and that, of course, meant Marie was waiting. He turned back to the judge, and the man's dry voice began to recite the charges from a sheet of official paper.

"By virtue of a death declaration of one Pierre Tenet, found guilty of uttering King's coins and thereby being executed, one Gerard, alias other names, has been taken and brought to dock for complicity in the robbery of the Duck and Goose, a tavern operated by one Héloise." The judge yawned boredly, holding the incense-saturated handkerchief before his nose so that the vapors emanating from the silent crowd should not give him some disease. "How does the prisoner plead?"

"Not guilty, Your Worship," Villon said. This was a familiar routine to him.

"How says the prosecutor?" the judge asked, and ate a sweetmeat.

"Guilty, Your Worship," the prosecutor answered bleakly. He pointed to three people, a fat blowsy doxie and two men in the witnesses' section. "These good citizens can make identification."

"What say you?" the judge asked.

The doxie leaned forward, her fat face wrinkled. "He is the one who waited outside, Your Worship," she said. "I would know that long beak anywhere."

Laughter ran about the room, and Villon flushed.

"He's the one," the first man said, and the second nodded in agreement.

The judge licked his lips. "The guilt is obvious," he began, and Villon interrupted.

"I have a witness, an unimpeachable witness, Your Worship," he said.

"Who?"

"The testimony will be private, Your Worship." Villon nodded at the door of the guarded room. "If I may talk with the witness a moment?"

"Granted." The judge bent to speak softly to the prosecutor.

François Villon stepped from the dock, going down the narrow aisle to the guarded door.

Deftly he palmed the latch and went through.

"Marie—" he began.

"We meet again, Monsieur," Cosin de Courevant said from across the room. "But now the situation is a bit different."

"But Ma—"

"She could not come," de Courevant said viciously, and light played on the thin sword he had drawn from its cane sheath. "Think you that I am a complete fool! Her maid is in my pay; that was why I almost confronted you last night in Lady Marie's room. She told me of your scheme to thwart the law; she overheard it at

"The testimony will be private, Your Worship." Villon nodded at the door of the guarded room. "If I may talk with the witness a moment?"

a door, and so passed it on to me. Even now Lady Marie is far from Paris, *en route* to my castle in Tours." He laughed softly, the sound like the whisper of silk on silk. "You may be gratified to know that she did not go willingly."

François Villon drew in a deep breath. This, then, was the end of his scheme. Rage came to his mind, and he took a long step forward, halting only at the sword's threat.

"And so I win—I, the powerless old man," Cosin de Courevant said grimly. "You lose Marie, your liberty—and this will hurt the most—your poetry award, which you so cleverly planned to win."

His laughter was bitter and ugly and ringing with triumph. Villon listened for a moment, then turned and went back through the door. He walked slowly, despair and futility in his mind. He reëntered the dock, standing straight and facing the judge.

"Where is the witness?" the judge asked.

François Villon drew a deep breath. From the corner of his eye he caught a sudden movement at the rear of the room. Bagot was there, making a silent sign. Gerard, then, had made his escape.

"I have no witness, Your Worship," François said gently.

"One hundred and twenty days," the judge said grimly. "Next case."

Villon stepped from the dock. He was smiling at Bagot. He had lost everything he had wanted, everything he had coveted; and yet, strangely, it did not matter as much as he had thought. Seeing Bagot's face, seeing it before sentence had been passed, and knowing the gratitude which lay in his friend's mind, more than repaid him for what he was about to undergo.

He winked at Bagot, and then the guard had led him from the room, and he was stepping into the compound which was to be his home for weeks to come. He smelled the odors and felt the cramping of the towering walls. He looked about into the faces, hopeless, foxy, defeated, arrogant, and he set his cap at a jaunty angle atop his head.

"Ho!" he cried. "It is I, Villon, lately of the King's Court, poet and adventurer, and"—and he caught his breath—"almost the Poet Laureate of all France. Who will buy a drink for a ballade?"

He heard the cries and the laughter; and then he was going toward old friends, his step light and almost gay, swaggering as only a rogue-poet could walk.

He had the prescience then that his star would never ride so high but that some mortal could bring it back to earth. He had the sense within him that, if ever his name should ring with praise, that time would be long after he was gone.

And thinking that, he laughed softly in his throat, and reached for the glass of purple wine a fellow-prisoner thrust into his eager hand.

Some twenty years ago Gerald Beaumont wrote many well-liked stories about the Information Kid; and this author's untimely death was deeply mourned . . . Here his son quite legitimately —and ably—revives the elder Beaumont's favorite character.

by WILLIAM GERALD BEAUMONT

Illustrated by Manning DeV. Lee

The Return of

"Oh, you take to the bottle to be alone
But you've uncles and aunts and brothers
Who'll pester the life out of every groan
And cause you thousands of others."

THE Information Kid waited until the last dreary notes of an overstrained tenor packed themselves off to oblivion before he broke a three-hour silence—a record which he would take with him to Eternity.

"Henry," he said, "lemme tell you a story."

"Shoot." Henry the Rat nestled himself deeper into a corner of the boxcar, plunking a few more chords from his guitar.

"Ever read the Bible?" The Rat raised his head thoughtfully. . . . "No, I thought not. Well, a couple of grands ago—stretch it a bit, say three or four, Adam an' Eve started housekeeping in Paradise. The Bible says *this* pair of originals were kicked out by their Landlord, cause they knew too much—a job, Henry my boy, you'd have a helluva time pullin' off."

"C'mon, what's the point?" Henry the Rat squirmed uneasily.

"The point is this: Adam an' Eve were booked on the wrong charge. Nobody kicked them out—they left because they wanted to. And it was all because of Gabriel—"

"Gabriel?"

"He played the guitar."

The Rat's comeback was cut short by the sudden jolting of the train; and the two of them, legs entwined, hit the end of the boxcar simultaneously.

"Snake-eyes!" the Kid exclaimed.

"Nuts!" said the Rat.

"Livermore, you guys—pile out!"

"What was that you said, honey-chil'?" The Information Kid sprang to his feet and smoothed out his bright-checkered suit.

The brakeman looked him up and down coldly. "I said—"

"Do y' hear that, Henry? The little man said Livermore—heaven, we're home! Gangway!"

All five-feet-four-inches of the Information Kid stretched themselves luxuriously under a bright California sun, lying like a gold dollar on the bar of a polished sky.

"Heaven, Henry! Throw your banjo away and listen to the music of the spheres."

Henry the Rat stole one glance at the gleam in his friend's eye and frowned. "Kid," he said, "you ain't forgettin' your promise already, are you?"

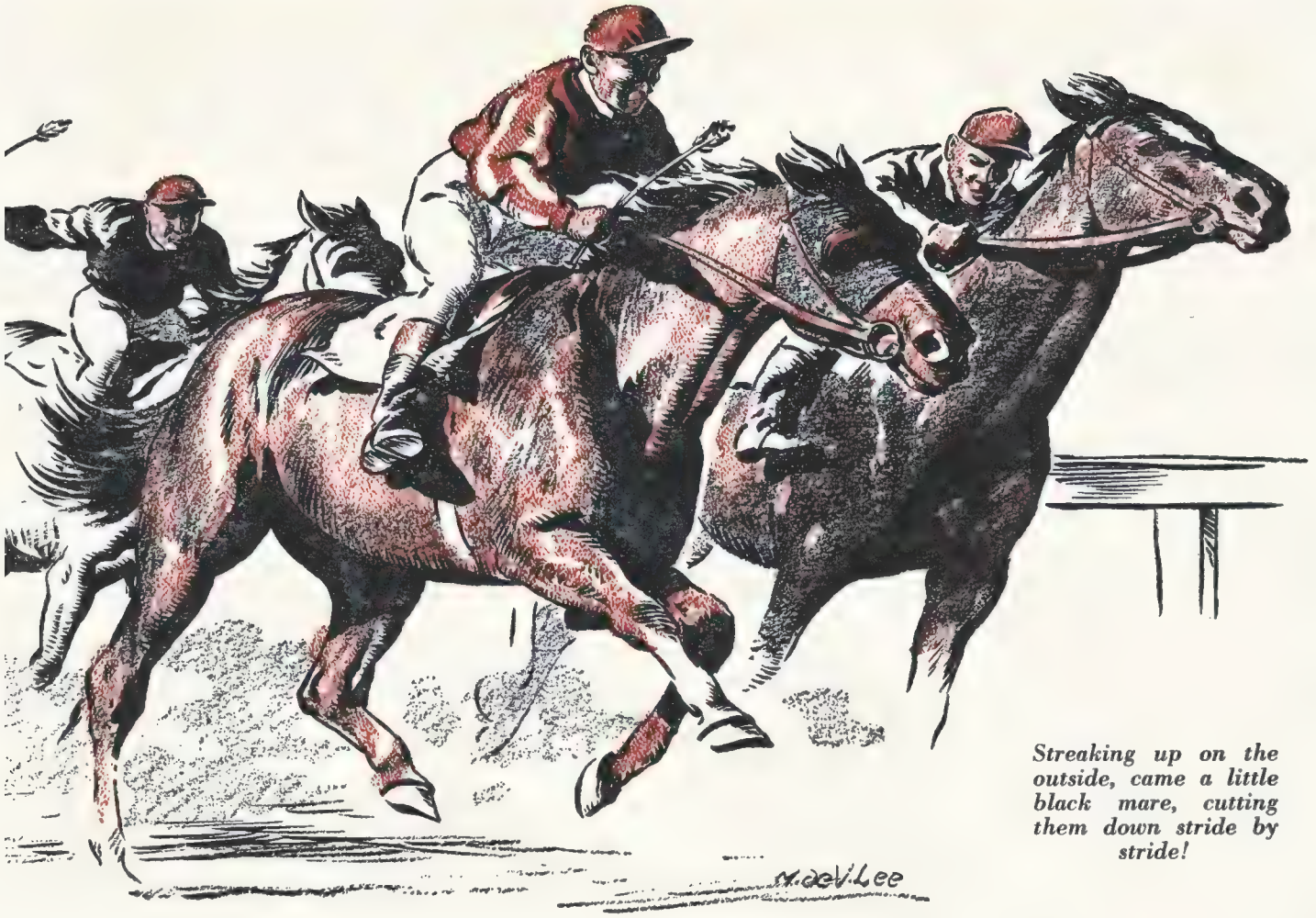
The Information Kid studied the green oval track in the distance, nestling between the brown Livermore hills. A small black speck was rounding the track, little puffs of white, like the gasps of an engine, kicking up behind it.

"Mile in one-forty-six at the best. Runs with its head low, heavy on the turns, a plug-ugly, and even that's giving it a break. Henry, I'd be willing to bet every cent I had that, giving that nag a hundred-yard handicap, even *you* could beat her! C'mon—let's introduce ourselves to the sucker that owns her, and see if Tod's around."

The Information Kid was referring of course to Tod Pennington, his old friend, and incidentally one of the greatest and most consistent cup-winners in the history of the American turf. Tod had ushered out more kings and queens of the equine world than history books had in the human. No sooner did he spring a demure thousand-pound débutante on the gold and silver boys than she had waltzed away with top honors and added one more crown to the Pennington stables—nicknamed the Antique and Old Silverware shop by the game's envious. The Livermore track was just another of Tod's stamping-grounds.

"Do mah eyes deceive me, or ain't dat ol' Info'mation hisself!" A Negro swipe jumped down from his perch on the circular railing. "When'd you get out o' the Army, Kid?"

"It's a long story, Snowball—I'll only say in passing that if it hadn't been for



Streaking up on the outside, came a little black mare, cutting them down stride by stride!

the Information Kid

me and a couple of guys like the Rat here—

"Well, Henry, you tell him!" And he was off.

"Snowball, why am I so dumb?" sighed Henry the Rat as the two of them stared at the retreating back interspersed between them and the sun. "Here I let myself be talked into believin' the Kid was leavin' the track for good. All the time he was in Europe, he kept tellin' me how he'd saved up enough dough to settle down and take it easy. I saw myself leadin' a soft life, he and me dividin' our cash together. But first, he says, we must tell the boys, make 'em green with envy of the plans we got. But the second he got a whiff of the stables —I don't like it, Snowball, get me?"

"He-he-he-he!" chuckled Snowball. "Man, you *was* a suckah! Ol' Inf'mation got mo' racin' blood in his little fingah than Man o' War in his whole body. Ain't gonna settle him down one bit, no *suh!*"

Snowball nodded in the direction of the track. The Information Kid was sitting astride the rail peering over the shoulder of Doc Freeborn. The Pennington head trainer was holding a stop-watch on the black mare they had seen from a distance.

"Well, I'll stick it for a couple a days," the Rat growled. "If he's bit for good, I'm grabbin' the first train to Shangri-la, where they never even heard of a horse!"

And he wandered off in the direction of the stables. Snowball watched him for a few moments, until the line of direction suddenly veered off again at right angles, and the Rat's latitude moved perceptibly closer to the Information Kid's.

"Poor Mistah Rat," Snowball muttered, shaking his head. "You bettah grab dat choo-choo right now—you's bit worse than the Kid hisself!" He chuckled. "Things am beginnin' to look up, yas suh!"

"One-forty-three!" snapped big Doc Freeborn; then shouted to the little Negro atop the black mare: "Give her a couple more turns to sweat it off, an bring her in—"

A VOICE at his elbow interrupted him. "What's up, Doc? Gettin' sentimental in your old age? That nag just tripped the light fantastic in four-four time. Your clock says one forty-seven!"

Doc Freeborn turned, then almost fell off the railing. *"You!"* he exclaimed, and none too benevolently added: "What the dickens are you doing here?"

"The Heinies bored me. But allow me to introduce a genuine French duke I managed to collect on the way over—Monsieur Henri—"

"What's up, Doc? That nag just tripped the light fantastic in four-four time."

Doc cast a malevolent glance at Henry the Rat. "You haven't changed a bit."

"Likewise," retorted that gentleman, somewhat stung by his reception.

"Okay! Tell me all about it, Doc," said the Information Kid as the three of them walked slowly back toward the stables. "Why the four-second eclipse on that omnipotent brain of yours?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"You know as well as I do, that milk-wagon couldn't run one-forty-three even with Queen Mab on her back."

"Who's that jockey?" inquired the Rat.

The Information Kid waved his hand and recited to the Livermore hills:

"She is the fairie's midwife, and she comes in shape no bigger than an agate stone on the forefinger of an alderman—"

A feminine voice, high and sweet, broke in behind them:

"—drawn with a team of little atomies athwart men's noses as they lie asleep. Her wagon spokes made of long spinners' legs, The cover, of the wings of grasshoppers; Her traces—"

"Enough! Enough!" The Information Kid held up his hand in protest. "Where the devil did you learn *that?*"

An extremely pretty face grew even prettier as it smiled back at him. "I might ask *you* the same question, mightn't I?"

"That's easy; *I* know everything!"

"The Information Kid!" she exclaimed.

"I take it back," he said. "*You* know everything. From now on, I am as putty in your hands. Lead on, Macduff!" And without taking leave of his two friends, he promptly led the pretty young blonde in a line which promised the least resistance.

"Her name is Carlisle—Bonnie Carlisle!" Doc Freeborn yelled after him. "And she's engaged to—"

"Write it down, Doc. I'm busy!" Then in a gentler tone, the Kid glanced at his amused partner, who was just his size *without* heels, and asked:

"That you should know who *I* am doesn't surprise me. Anyone who's been within fifty miles of a racetrack is bound to know that. But—Shakespeare? When'd you start scannin' the Bard?"

"When I was at college, of course."

The Information Kid looked at her in disgust. "I might have known it!"

"You've never been—"

"*I* know everything. From the name and weight of each of Hannibal's elephants, right down to—to—" He waved in the direction of the track. "To knowin' that whoever runs *that* glue-works is trying his best to prove there ain't gonna be no progress made *this* century. Who owns the nag?"

"I do."

Her companion stopped dead in his tracks.

"I bought her for five hundred dollars from Mr. Pennington." The under-lip came out in pretty defiance. "And what's more, I'm going to run her in the Del Mar Handicap!"

The Information Kid stood there and took the full count. When he came to his senses, Bonnie Carlisle's neat-looking figure had disappeared into the shadows of the Pennington stables. . . .

The Kid found out that Tod Pennington was staying at a hotel in Chicago, and promptly sent him the following telegram:

> WHAT IS THE IDEA OF SELLING GOLDILOCKS A MILK-WAGON? EVEN DOC FEELS SORRY FOR HER AND CHEATS THE HELL OFF HIS STOP-WATCH. SHE CAN BUY A SWEET SET OF DOLLS FOR FIVE HUNDRED C'S. HAVE A HEART!
>
> THE INFORMATION KID

In the morning came the response:

> GLAD TO SEE YOU BACK. THOUGHT YOU WERE DIGGING A GRAVE SOMEWHERE IN INDIANA. AS FOR THE FIVE HUNDRED—WHO SAYS I'M NOT A DOLL-COLLECTOR MYSELF?
>
> T. PENNINGTON

"Wise guy!" snarled the Information Kid, and hurled the telegram into the nearest waste-basket.

"Look, Kid—" And Henry the Rat adopted his most persuasive tone. "Let's get out of here. Think of that little street with all the trees on it—a life of ease—maybe a little farmin'—"

"We grab the first train tonight after dinner—"

"Ya mean it, Kid?" Henry the Rat leaped to his feet.

THE Information Kid was staring gloomily out of the bunk-window. A black mare was cantering slowly around the track. A lithe feminine figure attired in a pale blue dress was standing by the rail, the wind playing with her hair. She too was watching every movement of the horse.

"Yeah, I mean it, Henry," the Kid responded. "This game is crowding in on the Children's Hour. And I

don't want to stick around till old Lady Fortune scares 'em to death."

A few minutes later a tall, good-looking young man leaned over the track fence. "Hello, Bonnie," he said, accompanying the words with a kiss.

"Jeff!" The worried look instantly changed to one of delight. "Oh, Jeff—thank heaven you've come! I was beginning to wonder—"

"If I had suddenly acquired cold feet in regard to you and Duchess Billie?" He nodded toward the black mare.

Bonnie was silent.

"Wouldn't that be a little hard on your sis, darling?"

For answer Bonnie squeezed his hand and gave him a look which only a blind man could miss.

The two of them lapsed into silence, with their eyes anxiously trained on Duchess Billie Pennington—the little mare of whom they were secretly asking so much.

"If only *she* knew, Jeff, I'd feel much safer about it. The little we had wasn't enough, was it?" Bonnie turned to him, tears suddenly starting in her eyes. "Jeff, it wasn't enough?"

"No, Bonnie." Jeff Rogers studied the hills in the distance, his mind on far-away things. He envisioned the little house he and Bonnie had planned together, the sunlit breakfast-room, the myrtles, the peace and quiet of a warm valley. Then he thought of a not-so-peaceful valley, where Bonnie's sister was fighting a losing battle with polio. The money they had saved up for the house had been diverted to the immediate need. But it was not enough. Jean had to be flown East, given the best care, put under the supervision of the finest clinic. It might take years. That was why they were risking all on a gamble. And that gamble rested on the heart and legs of a little black mare Tod Pennington had "given away" for five hundred dollars!

"Jeff," asked Bonnie suddenly, "have you ever heard of the Information Kid?"

"The Infor— Say, is *he* here?"

Bonnie looked up in surprise. "Yes—but—"

"Darling, don't ask any questions—just get hold of that character. He can tell us just how much of a chance Duchess Billie has! He—"

Bonnie stopped him in dismay. "He's already seen her, Jeff."

Jeff looked anxiously into her face. "He doesn't—like the Duchess?" His voice was a whisper.

Bonnie shook her head; then suddenly she seized his hand. "Oh, Jeff, there's not a person in the world who doesn't make a mistake sometime! What makes you think—"

"The Information Kid never makes a mistake, Bonnie. He knows everything."

"Yes, that's just what *he* said."

The silence that followed was uncomfortable. They gloomily focused their attention on Duchess Billie. The little mare was rounding the far turn. Tomorrow, Lackadaisical Jones would give her her head, and Doc Freeborn would be there, stop-watch in hand, doing his best for Bonnie Carlisle; he too, however, like the Information Kid, thought the task hopeless.

"Jeff!" Bonnie turned to him suddenly, a fighting gleam in her eyes. "Duchess and I are going to come through next week, in spite of all you men can say!"

Jeff took her in his arms and gazed out over the hills. Everything was gorgeously dancing in a haze. The valley streamed with sunlight. Even Duchess Billie seemed affected by the sudden radiance in the atmosphere, and was churning up the back-stretch in a streak of ebony.

"Duchess," Jeff murmured, speaking softly to the black mare—"just you live up to your owner next week, and I'll tell the whole wide world it'll see what heart can do when the chips are down!"

FOR some odd reason, perhaps because the three Graces slipped up on a couple of knots in their weaving, the Information Kid and Henry the Rat did not catch the first train that night as planned. Nor did they catch the last. A violent argument between them ended with the Rat's breaking his guitar over the nearest fence-post—a calamity which made everyone present but the Information Kid tear his hair and curse the guiding stars.

"Kid," cried the Rat mournfully, "are we, or are we not going to Indiana?"

The Information Kid patted the thick envelope in his coat-pocket thoughtfully. Twenty-five hundred dollars wasn't much to settle down on, but add Henry the Rat's two thousand, and you had enough for the down payment on a house. And perhaps one day, if one worked hard enough—Then he thought once more of what Doc Freeborn had said that morning about Bonnie Carlisle and her sister Jean. And to avoid the Rat's question, he walked hurriedly out of the bunk-house in the direction of the track.

"One-forty-two!" Doc Freeborn's booming baritone carried Duchess Billie's mile time to the hearing of the Information Kid. The latter smiled, shook his head sadly and approached the little group surrounding the Pennington head trainer.

But a strange thing happened. Doc came to meet him halfway, his face wreathed in smiles. He waved the stop-watch before the Kid's startled face.

"All joking aside, take a look at *this*, and tell me what you see!"

The Information Kid gasped.

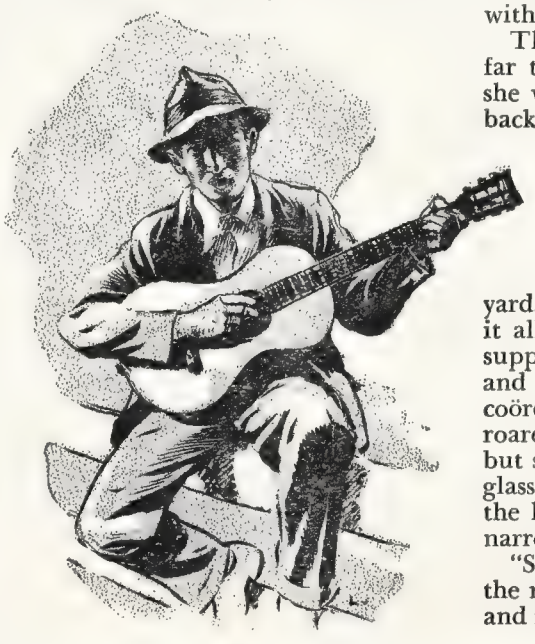
There it was—one-forty-two on the nose! "Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego! Is it real? Are you kidding, Doc? Did that old sea-horse—" He stared from one smiling face to another—from Bonnie, to Jeff, to Snowball and back to Doc Freeborn in utter amazement. Then his eyes narrowed, and seizing the Doc's field-glasses, he trained them on the black mare, now cantering softly down the back-stretch.

"Let her have her head around one more turn, Doc," he pleaded. "Just lemme see her move on one more turn!"

Doc Freeborn hesitated; then at a signal from Bonnie Carlisle, shouted to Lackadaisical Jones to "spin her around again!"

Lackadaisical, grinning from ear to ear, needed no second urging, and moving forward on the Duchess' back did as was commanded—full steam with throttle open!

The little mare pounded around the far turn, hugging the rail as though she were tied to it, her ears flattened back, her stride increasing at every



"Let's get out of here. Think of that little street with the trees!"

yard. And the Information Kid took it all in. The broad chest, the long supple legs, the roll of each muscle and joint in a powerful, beautifully coördinated little body. The Duchess roared past him in a cloud of smoke, but still he kept his eyes glued to the glasses. He had caught something up the home-stretch. . . . Then his eyes narrowed to mere slits.

"So that's why she leans a little to the right!" he murmured to himself—and focused his attention closer on the

"I bought her for five hundred dollars. And what's more, I'm going to run her in the handicap!"

left hindleg of the little mare. Only an eye trained for years in judging racehorses, knowing their every fault as well as virtue, could have seen so immediately what the Information Kid had seen. The little black mare rolled ever so slightly to the right as she ran, the balance away from the left hindleg to the right fore. And as she cantered up to them, the Kid's diagnosis was verified by the sharp though delicate way the Duchess had in moving off her weak leg.

"One-forty-two on three and a half gams!" the Kid muttered softly, and let a slow whistle escape him. "Sweet mamma! *Here* it's all right, but what about when she's traveling in company?"

He pictured what most track-followers have had dreams about—a gallant horse floundering helplessly in the wake of a thundering field, suddenly to collapse, her jockey flung over her head. Then—the Information Kid closed his eyes.

"Well, Mr. Information," said Bonnie Carlisle, "do you still hold out on knowing everything?" But the Kid didn't get his name from thin air, and his insight into human beings was not far off center. He recognized a note of pleading in the girl's voice, and knew right away what he should answer.

"Miss Carlisle, I take it all back. You've got the sweetest little prospect this side of Cleopatra! Duchess Billie will spread twenty-four hours of daylight between her and the rest of the field. And you can put *that* down in the book!"

ON that same evening the Information Kid walked into Doc Freeborn's bunkhouse.

"I was expecting you," said Doc. "Sit down."

There was a moment of silence as the two men studied each other. Then Doc Freeborn leaned back and blew a cloud of smoke ceilingward.

"Why the big build-up for the one-forty-two this afternoon?"

The Information Kid sat up. "How did you—"

The Doc interrupted him with a wave of his hand. "One-forty-two is good, but it isn't *that* good, and *you* know it. C'mon, Kid, what's the idea?"

His visitor was again silent, scrutinizing the man opposite him. Then a slow grin spread over his face. "It must've been the war—eh, Doc?"

"What do you mean?"

"The racetrack doesn't breed sentimentalists—how'd you and I get this way?"

The head trainer for Pennington blushed like a schoolgirl, and to avoid the Kid's penetrating gaze, rose and

walked to the window. Then in a tone which surprised even his informed little friend, he began:

"Have you ever thought what would happen if I were to be absolutely true to my profession, and pulled Duchess Billie off the track next week?"

"Ye-es—that's why—"

"That mile she ran today was no accident, Kid. Sure, for the past month or two I've been cheating like blazes on the time—for Bonnie's sake. But in the back of my head there was an idea running around loose, and that idea kept telling me that maybe one day that little mare *would* run a mile in something better than four-four time." The Kid winced. "And I was right. It's the gameness of a little horse against a woman's life. Bonnie and Jeff are staking all on a long shot. They'd never have enough to pull that girl through alone—they've got to double, even triple their money, or—go down fighting."

There was a silence. Doc Freeborn studied the stars outside thoughtfully. The Information Kid suddenly took great interest in a crack in the floor.

"I've done everything I could for that leg," Doc Freeborn said at last. "There's a ten-to-one chance she can last it out—do you think?" The older man turned, a tired and worn expression on his face. There was a look of pleading in his eyes.

The Information Kid got to his feet with a wry smile. "Ten-to-one ain't the worst odds in the world, Doc."

Doc Freeborn smiled and stretched out his hand. "Thanks, Kid—she'll run!"

"*And* win—shake those dice twice, Doc, before you call your shot!"

THE fifth day of the Del Mar Handicap was at hand. By two o'clock the first race was already up and past. The stands were filled to overflowing. The day was perfect—the track lightning-fast. Racing adherents from all points of the Pacific Coast were assembled to witness the afternoon's main attraction—the grueling mile, surest test of a stout heart and strong legs—eight furlongs of championship drive in a field studded with brilliant performers!

Up from three successive winnings in the South came the day's prime favorite, Venezuela, a giant bay. And right behind him at almost even odds was the great gelding Blue Rocket, winner of the recent Meadowbrook handicap in the blistering time of one thirty-seven flat. Third in this championship trio came White o' the Moon, a notoriously fast-finishing mare. The rest of the field were left to fight it out among themselves: Indian Smoke, Colonel Jim, Atom Bomb, Sweetheart and Duchess Billie.

Concerning Duchess Billie, the comment was as follows:

"Old Pennington stock. Unimpressive to date. Could help set early pace."

The odds were fifteen-to-one five minutes before post-time, and had jumped to twenty by the time the field was led by the grandstand.

The Information Kid, resplendent in his checkered suit, was all over the stands that day. Seeking out first Doc Freeborn, then Jeff Rogers and Bonnie Carlisle, then to the betting circle, where two-to-one, then three-to-one, then five-to-one odds were posted for Venezuela—Blue Rocket coming in at seven-to-two along with White o' the Moon.

He located Bonnie Carlisle in the grandstand and whispered to her: "The odds have jumped to twenty-to-one, and the purse is five thousand. Ye gods, do you know what it'll mean if—"

Bonnie attempted a weak smile. "I don't like to think of that—I just pray! Here—" She fumbled nervously in her handbag and drew forth some crumpled bills. "Put every cent of this on the Duchess!"

The Kid counted them, then whistled. "One thousand smackers!" He hesitated, was about to say something, then changed his mind as Bonnie had already turned and was watching the other end of the track anxiously.

At the betting circle the Kid stopped, a foolish grin coming over his face. Then he drew from his pocket the bulging envelope that had nestled there for so long, and placed his bet:

"Two thousand on Duchess Billie to win!"

A moment later he was standing beside Jeff and Bonnie as the field of eight starters paraded past them. He took one look at the favorites, Venezuela and Blue Rocket, and groaned. Both the bay and the gelding were in top form and looking every inch their class. He shook his head sadly and trained his glasses on Duchess Billie. She was cantering along daintily on bandaged legs, Lackadaisical Jones astride her, grinning from ear to ear as usual. The Kid stole a glance at the pair beside him. They were holding hands tightly and looking pale. He was about to speak when the shout, *"They're off!"* coupled with the shrill clang of an electric gong, sent the crowd into an uproar and concentrated every eye on the thickly bunched group of horses breaking for the rail.

The wheel of fortune spun dizzily into motion. And while a pale girl lay sleeping in a dark room not far distant, unconscious of the world and all its vicissitudes, Bonnie Carlisle and Jeff Rogers staked all they had on a long shot and prayed; the race was on!

Blue Rocket, pressed closely by White o' the Moon and Indian Smoke, took the rail and held it as the field thundered past the grandstand. Duchess Billie, off to a bad start, was jostled rudely in the get-away, broke her stride and dropped behind. Going into the first turn, the field loosened out a bit; and above the incessant roar of the crowd came the caller's drone:

"Blue Rocket, White o' the Moon, Indian Smoke, Atom Bomb, Venezuela—"

The cry "Venezuela! Venezuela!" rose from a thousand throats as the big bay, driving hard, moved up on the outside and shot ahead at the quarter-mile post.

"Quarter in twenty-three!" called the clocker.

"MY God!" the Information Kid exclaimed. "He's killin' off the field!" His heart sank as he thought of the little mare, lost somewhere in the second or third division. He looked for the flash of white bandages, couldn't find them, and in a sudden panic trained his glasses on the empty track behind the runners. "No, she's still up there—but where?"

"Where is she—where is Duchess Billie?" Bonnie Carlisle clutched his arm. The Kid had one glimpse of a frightened, drawn little face looking from him to Jeff in dismay. "Where is—"

At the half-mile mark the caller droned out once more:

"Venezuela by half a length, Blue Rocket by one, White o' the Moon by three, Atom Bomb—"

The crowd went wild, realizing that they were seeing the race of the year as all three favorites moved farther and farther ahead of the field in a thunder of hoofbeats.

"Half in forty-seven!"

The Information Kid stole a quick glance at his program. The track record was just over one thirty-six. If they kept on this way—in his enthusiasm he left off searching for Duchess Billie and along with twenty thousand other spectators, held his glasses on the lead horse, Venezuela.

They swept down the back-stretch, the front order unchanged. But while the crowd had eyes only for the leaders, something was going on in the tight little knot several lengths behind. Lackadaisical Jones, despairing of an opening through which he could squeeze his little mare, had taken a long chance. In one split-second he had dropped Duchess Billie a half-length behind the field and swerved her to the outside. Now, bending low over the mare's neck, he urged her on.

"C'mon, you li'l' black sweethea't—go on out, now, an' get 'em—Miz Bonnie's waitin' for ya, honey. Step now! St-e-ep!"

Duchess Billie did just that.

At the three-quarter mark she steadily but surely overhauled Sweetheart and Colonel Jim, and pulled even with

Atom Bomb, four lengths in back of the leaders and fading fast.

Up in the stands a girl in a pale blue dress suddenly came to life. "Duchess Billie! Duchess Billie! There she comes!" She clutched the Information Kid by the arm and wildly pointed to a little black spot all by itself between the three leaders and the closely knit group some distance behind them.

There going into the last quarter-mile were Blue Rocket and Venezuela, running neck and neck, with White o' the Moon a bare length behind—and there, streaking up on the outside, came a little black mare, her ears flattened back, a gleam of scarlet in her eyes. And she was cutting them down stride by stride!

A roar went up from the crowd. Thousands pressed closer to the rail, their eyes and hearts now swerving to the unknown who was about to give two of the greatest stretch-drivers in racing the fight of their lives.

"Sweet mamma! Look at the darlin' come! Oh, you Duchess—oh, you baby! A record—a record! C'mon, you little sweetheart!"

Then the Information Kid suddenly forgot to yell and held his breath in suspense. Only one pair of eyes other than his had caught the change in Duchess Billie's stride, and they were Doc Freeborn's. And at that instant both men uttered the same prayer—calling on the gods to help the Duchess down the home-stretch on three and a half gallant little legs.

Some say that horses have instincts which man will never fathom. That through some mysterious channel there comes to them the will of others—reaching them in proportion to the size of their own heart and determination. Duchess Billie didn't know a life depended upon what she did in the next few seconds; she knew nothing about human beings' relation to one another; but she did know, somehow, that there was a will in back of her no force could resist. And she responded with everything she had, and more.

A ROAR rose from the packed stand, increasing in volume as the three leaders, now suddenly joined by a fourth, swung into the home-stretch.

Above the crowd came the chant of the caller: "Venezuela by a neck, Blue Rocket by a length, Duchess Billie on the outside—"

Duchess Billie, running the race of her life, rolling slightly to her right side, tore down to the wire with all the strength she could muster.

And Lackadaisical Jones, his hands gripping the reins almost to the bit, was riding as few men had ridden before him—with arms, legs, heart and soul. Past White o' the Moon, half a length, then inch by inch past the great gelding Blue Rocket—

"Venezuela by half a length, Venezuela by a neck, Venezuela—"

A sea of shouts and cries drowned out the loud-speaker as a black mare and a bay fought it out stride by stride right up to the paddock—before the bay weakened inch by painful inch, and at the wire it was the mare by a neck and going away!

There was a hush as every eye went to an iron framework across the track. First a one, then a three, then a six appeared—nothing more came.

THREE figures in that wild hysterical crowd went wilder than all the rest. The Information Kid seized Bonnie and Jeff by turn and tried to tell them what they already knew.

"My God! What a horse! It's a record—a record!" he screamed. "Did you see her on the back-stretch—see that old Pennington finish—did you see—" He stopped, suddenly realizing that he was shouting at thin air. Bonnie and Jeff had miraculously melted into one person. And Bonnie was crying softly. "She's done it, Jeff," she whispered beneath the surging roar around them. "Duchess—Jean—" She could not go on.

The Information Kid had to argue for a full fifteen minutes before he could persuade Bonnie Carlisle that she had given him four five-hundred-dollar bills instead of two. He proved it by the stars and whatever other factual evidence he could call on. Then he watched them go—Bonnie and Jeff, hand in hand, to show Jean Carlisle just what friends she really had—and perhaps to tell her also of the rarest spectacle the racing world can offer—a tip-off specialist with a heart of gold.

Henry the Rat patted his new guitar lovingly and settled back onto a pile of straw in the boxcar. Then he struck out alone into vaguely charted seas:

Her poor old head was covered with snow,
Oh, what a sight to see!
And no one there to bury her
But me and Mar-ger-ee!

"Henry," murmured the Information Kid, "lemme tell you a story."

"Shoot." Henry the Rat laid aside his guitar and prepared to listen, always hoping that some day he would at last understand his companion's involved and learned tales.

"It all goes back to Cleopatra and the seven musicians of the Nile. It—"

The Rat looked up suddenly. "Kid, what's you say the name of that lady wuz—you know, the one who's goin' to let us bunk at her place for life?"

"Aunt Jane."

"Yeh, that's it—Aunt Jane." And Henry the Rat gazed up at imaginary stars dreamily, trying to picture what their new benefactress would look like.

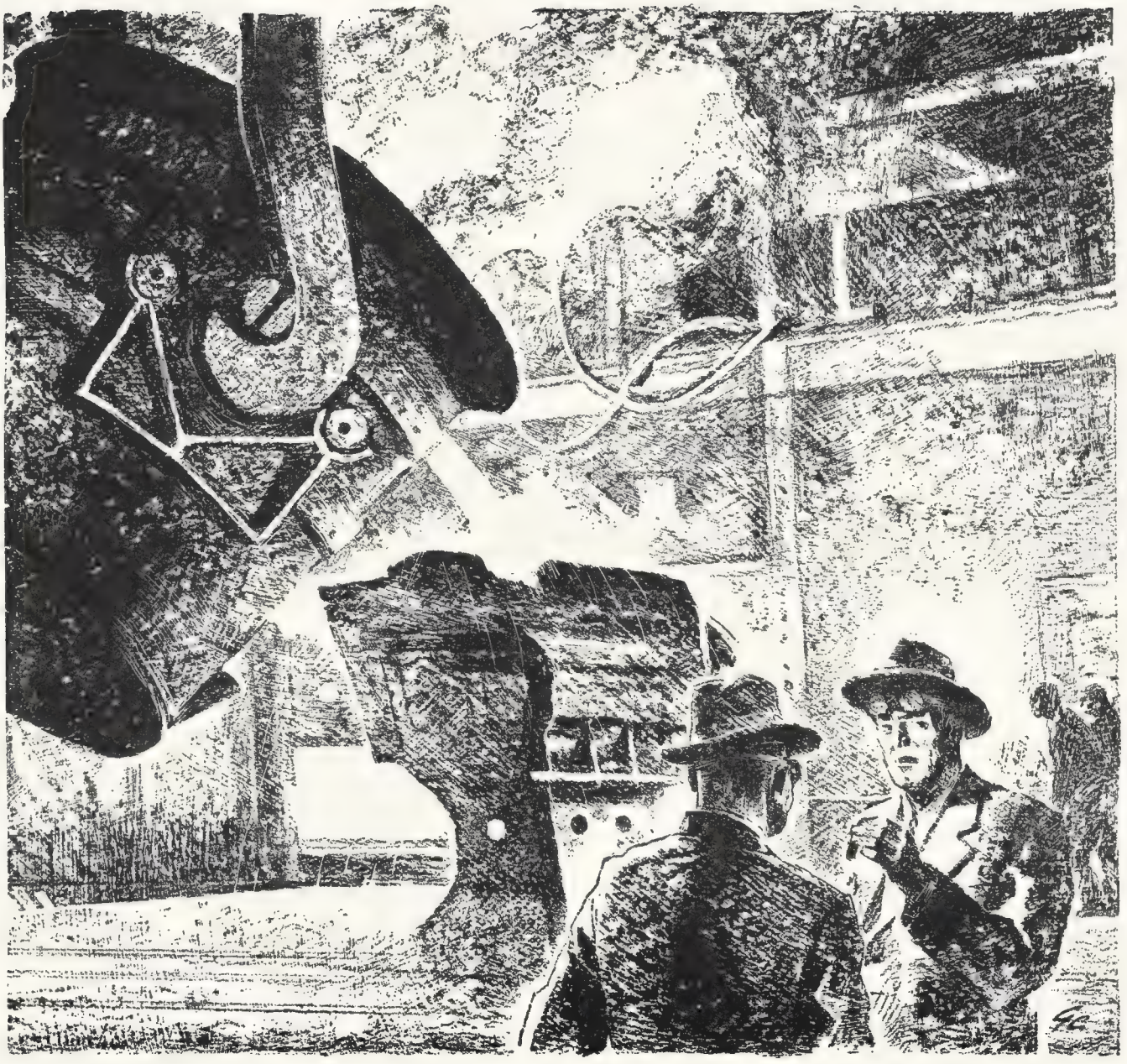
It was a pity the Rat was not a linguist. South of the Border, Aunt Jane read "Tia Juana."

There's a lot of human nature goes into the making of steel —as witness this fine story.

by RAY MILLHOLLAND

PROPERLY arrayed, accoutered and provisioned—which included a nail-keg filled with chipped ice clamped to the running-board of his car—Mr. Dan Bergan was about to set forth upon a Florida winter's day in quest of both profit and sport, when Mollie slid a plump hand into the mail-box and produced a letter which had been unnoticed for at least two days.

Knowing better than to issue any impatient commands to the benignly



The King of Slag

composed woman who had been his wife for fifty years, come next Christmas Eve, Dan allowed his huge hands to relax on the wheel, pretending to cat-nap while Mollie held the letter at arm's-length to read the return address of the sender.

"I can make neither tails nor feathers of the hen-scratching," she finally announced, walking to the car parked in the driveway, and rapping her husband on the knuckles with the edge of the envelope. "It's not backed in Blue Chip Haggerty's fist, so it must be from Pittsburgh."

The word *Pittsburgh* was like the clang of a fire-enginehouse gong to Dan Bergan, bringing back memories of the proud days when he was general superintendent of the Partridge Steel Mills and was known by sight to every policeman and street-car motorman in the city.

"I've never seen worse writing," remarked Mollie, after waiting just long enough for Dan to rip off the envelope in his haste to get at the news inside. "Than yours, even," she added with a chuckle. "Shall I get your close-seeing specs from the parlor, Danny lad?"

"If my arms were a foot longer, I'd need no specs at all," growled Dan, propping the letter up on the dash panel and leaning back as far as possible to read it. "Now mind your clacking tongue while I read. The important words is in Polish."

The letter was short, but the effect of the news it contained stimulated

Dan Bergan to unexpected action. He got out of his car and started unloading his fishing-gear.

"If it's somebody coming on the noon train," remarked Mollie, unerringly reading the signs, "you'll have to find me a piece of frying-meat, or they'll eat out of a tin can."

"Go in and change your duds," said Dan, removing the nail-keg filled with crushed ice and regretfully setting it in the shade of the porch. "And get out my overcoat and long underwear. We'll be seeing the frost of our breath, come this time tomorrow, in Pittsburgh."

Mollie said, meeting him eye to eye: "Out with it. Is it one of our Steve's little ones that's bad sick?" But her courage faded: "Oh, Danny—"

"Stop tearing your heart to shreds, woman, for no cause," grumbled Dan, then gathered his plump little wife to him with the sweep of his arm and patted her cheek. "Put your smile back on, or half the angels in heaven will break out crying for sadness without knowing what about."

"Neither do I," said Mollie, a little sharply. "All I know is, by the look on your face, it is bad news you've had. And not a stitch of clothes will I lay out for you until I know what the letter said."

"It's from Chris Majewski," said Dan, in a tone of surrender but with an angry rumble to it. "He says the Big Hats in the front office has decided to scrap the Barling Works—tear her down to the last brick and pitch the salamander onto the slag dump." He swept an angry gesture. "Wiped from the face of the earth, the oldest works of the company is to be. . . . Come, we're flying to Pittsburgh this day, and have it out with Steve or anybody higher that tries to tell me they can do this thing!"

Mollie shook her head, adamant in her determination. "You'll go, because there's no stopping a foolhardy man who loves to have his hard head banged against a brick wall. But I stay here and out of the swearing and hard words there'll be between you and my own son, for that is something I can't bear to take sides over."

THAT was the way of it. The next morning Dan strode through the gates of the main works of the Partridge Steel Company and into the vast, dingy multiple-story office building. He ignored the uniformed policeman at the reception desk and marched directly to the elevators, with the same long stride of his days when he himself was the boss of every man jack in the building, and every cinder-snapper and roll-setter in the sprawling smoke-belching works besides.

He flung back the door marked *"General Superintendent's Offices"* with an ill-concealed snort of contempt for the last word on the sign—it had been *Office,* only, in his day—and without further ceremony, stalked through a second door, marked *"Private,"* into the presence of his own son, Steve Bergan.

Steve Bergan—immaculately dressed as a bank president on Board of Directors' Day—gave the rawboned brash stranger invading the august privacy of his office a double take; then with mock sternness demanded: "You wild Irisher, what do you mean by dragging my children's grandmother out of Florida in the dead of winter? But hold everything while I call home and spread the big news." While reaching for a telephone, he added, impatiently, "Where have you parked Mom? I'll send a car for her."

"Your mother decided to stay home and keep out of this," said Dan.

All gladness drained from the look on Steve's face. He was a man in his middle forties, with the height and shoulder span of his father, and with the same look of command about him too—only a little less rough-hewn about the lips and lower jaw line. Standing now, out of deference to seniority, he nodded at a handsomely leather upholstered chair beside his and said quietly: "Sit down, Dan, and dump your beef. What has the Company been doing that you don't like?"

"There's only one thing that could drag me up here without Mollie," said Dan to his son, "and you know what that is without a thirty-minute speech from me."

With a silent nod of assent, Steve reached into the lower drawer of his desk and drew out a thick metal-bound typewritten report. He passed it over to his father.

"I know," he said. "You've got wind of the talk about what's to happen to the Barling Works." With a nod at the report of a survey of the Barling Works, made by one of the leading industrial engineering firms of the country, he added: "That's your copy. It was going out to you by mail today. It's going to make you mad as hell when you read it. But before you blow your snort-valve loose, just remember that the board of directors paid Clauson, Brown and Ferguson a lot of money for the survey of the Barling Works. I couldn't change their decision now, even if I wanted to."

"If you wanted to!" snorted Dan, seizing on the phrase as the text of the sermon he was about to deliver. "The bleeding your heart's doing for fine men and good steel-makers like Chris Majewski losing their jobs when the Barling Mill is tore down wouldn't show on an alderman's boiled-shirt-front." The veins in Dan's neck thickened, and to dissipate the pressure of his rising indignation, he flung an angry gesture toward the steel lattice-work of the ponderous ore-bridge visible from the window. "Men, no. But you'd tear the earth apart with your bare hands, if it was a fine efficient machine that a bunch of misguided fools had ordered scrapped before you'd allow it."

Steve Bergan sat with his hands loosely cupped over the arms of his fine swivel chair and allowed his father's invective to rain upon him, unmoved. There was more coming, and it was useless for any man to try interrupting when Dan Bergan was speaking his mind:

"IT'S only ten years since I gave up the job you now hold, smug as a pig with his snout in the meal-bin," snorted Dan. "But the whole business has been switched fore-end behind by a bunch of slick slide-rule artists inside the Works, working hand and handkerchief with a board of directors that wouldn't know an open-hearth furnace from a three-high merchant mill if they wore solid gold spectacles on their blue noses. It's men that make steel, m'lad—not mills and push buttons, and—and fancy creases in the pants of the likes of you and the board of directors that you stand in greater fear of than Purgatory."

Steve shrugged a bit uncomfortably. "Either I make steel at a profit, or the directors will find another man who will. The Barling Works has been losing money, even at full operation, since the end of the war. It is so out-of-date that it would cost more money to modernize it than the ground and buildings are worth."

He nodded at the thick report from the industrial engineering firm, being squeezed like a venomous snake in Dan's mighty fist. "It's all in that—as simple as putting five pennies in a bubblegum machine and getting back only three balls, only it's millions instead of pennies. You'd be ashamed of your own grandson, Danny, if he couldn't see it was a losing proposition."

"Then you'll not stand with me when I tangle with the directors over this?" demanded Dan, fixing an uncompromising eye on his own son.

"If the directors, at their next meeting on Wednesday, say pull her down, down she comes," answered Steve.

Dan stood up, his face rocklike. "Well, if I can get no help from my own flesh and blood, then I'm giving you fair warning, m'lad. Stay as far away from this fight as far the Saints will let you. For any man that is not with me in this thing is ag'in' me; and heaven help his widow if he comes within reach of my fists!"

He started for the door, and Steve called after him: "Shall I tell Ellen and your grandchildren that you'll be home to supper?"

"No, Steve. No, not tonight," answered Dan, dragging the words off his

"Any man that is not with me in this thing is ag'in' me."

tongue reluctantly. "I'll be supping on bitter bread tonight at Tisonville with Chris and Lena. But tell the children they'll see their ugly grandfather tomorrow, sure."

"They'll have their noses flattened against the parlor window all day looking for you, Dan," said Steve; but his smile lasted only long enough for his father to nod and stride out.

Dan Bergan was without lunch in his flat, hard stomach when that afternoon, about two, he walked into the office of the superintendent of the ancient and inefficient subsidiary of the Partridge Steel Mills, the Barling Works.

Chris Majewski's round, stolid face broke into a half-hearted smile when Dan Bergan's viselike grip closed over his hand.

"Lena said, for sure, you eat with us tonight, Dan."

"I rode a flying-machine to get up here," stated Dan gruffly. "And if you had put your letter in a bigger envelope that would've stuck out of the top of our mailbox for Mollie to see, I'd've been here yesterday."

"That's what Lena wanted me to do," said Chris apologetically.

"LOOK," said Dan, glowering at his old friend. "This is a *man's* fight. Hitch up your pants, Chris; let's not be hiding behind the women's aprons." A slow grin spread over his face. "Not that Mollie and Lena could not hold up their end of a good shindig. But they're both grandmothers now, and have to think of the bad example it would be to the little ones."

"We are both crying inside," said Chris simply. "But you are an Irishman. So you laugh."

"So be it," said Dan, grimly. "But when a crying Pole and a laughing Irishman gang up on somebody, it's bad news for the other side. Now give me the facts. How much more does it cost to make a ton of steel here than in the other mills?"

"Four dollars a ton, even with everybody down to floor-sweepers fighting the cost by saving the nails that fall on the floor in the shipping-room," answered Chris, sadly. "It is almost like back in the Old Country when I was a boy, so high. We used to go out in the nobleman's harvest field, after the crop was in the barn, to pick up what grain we could find on the ground. We walked to the fields hungry, and we walked home with not enough for one good meal around."

"It will never again be like that for you and Lena," said Dan gruffly. "You've got enough put by to keep the pot filled on the back of the stove if you lived to be a hundred and two, without drawing another pay-check. Not to say a word about your social security and pension checks from the retirement fund. Anyways, the Com-

pany won't turn you off, even if this mill is pulled down. You'll get a fine job, with a swell office somewhere else."

"Maybe that would be fine for an Irishman," said Chris, uncheered. "But with a Pole it is different." He tapped the top of his shabby desk almost tenderly. "Here is my life, and Lena's. Forty years I spent working up to being the biggest man in this mill and in the whole town of Tisonville, from just a clumsy, ignorant Polish immigrant boy that everybody kicked in the pants because he couldn't understand his Irish foreman's English."

"That's a damn' lie," said Dan hotly. "The only man who ever kicked you when I was your boss got the stubs of his front teeth knocked clear down his throat into his stomach!"

IT was bluff and bluster on Dan's part, but he brazened it out the rest of the afternoon while he cross-examined Chris on the changes that had taken place in the Company during the past ten years of Dan's own retirement from active duty. And the story he heard from Chris confirmed in detail—though from an entirely different point of view, naturally—the dispassionately damning facts set forth in the survey of the old mill, made by the outside industrial engineering firm of Clauson, Brown and Ferguson.

Briefly, the facts were these: During the war, the obsolete equipment of the Barling Mills was desperately needed, regardless of the cost per ton of the steel melted and rolled into thin-gauge sheets on its antiquated rolling mill. "Nobody asked about costs then," was Chris's sad commentary. "But as soon as it was the Company's own profits going down the drain again, all we got here was the dirty jobs none of the big mill wanted. They took away all of our auto-body sheet business, because Lakeside could roll it cheaper. Then they shifted all stainless sheet to—to—" Chris hesitated and began fumbling with a miniature model of a blast furnace charging bell on his desk—one he had invented, and which the Company had installed on all its blast furnaces.

"I'll say it for you," grunted Dan. "My own son, Steve, pulled that fat-profit stainless sheet business into Pittsburgh, so he could keep an eye on its growth and sweeten the profit report of the main works." He picked up a small test panel of a roughly finished bit of grayish sheet from the desk and gave it a confident tap with his finger.

"I notice, though, that they left you this high-silicon transformer iron to roll. And I know why. There's no other man in the company that knows how to roll the stubborn stuff and hold down the reject losses like you."

Chris spread his hands. "I only get the dirt-cheap stuff to make any more. The big tonnage on transformer sheet has been split up between Lakeside and the main works. They tell me I got a job either place when this mill is closed."

He lifted his eyes to Dan's. "But what good does it do for a man to go on working, just for money, when his heart is dead?"

Dan evaded the question by saying: "Let's go home and see what Lena's got to put on the table."

The welcome Dan received from Lena lacked the faintest hint of the deference with which old Chris—even though he were a big boss in his own right, and had been for twenty years—always treated Dan, the first boss he had ever known after his arrival in America. Lena was a large-boned woman in her early fifties. She was a high-school graduate and allowed no one to remain uninformed, for long, that she was also the graduate of a business college. She was not an "Old Country" girl—an immigrant like Chris; but neither had she any false shame that her parents had been.

"A good thing for you, Dan Bergan," she said, pointing a basting-spoon at him when he poked his head into her kitchen to announce his arrival, "a good thing for you this isn't Friday, you roast-pork-hungry mad Irishman!" Then she tipped back her head and laughed.

At the table, a few minutes after that, Chris bowed his head and folded his hands on his plate, but no sound came from his lips.

Lena said, quietly, "I'll do it, Poppa," and recited a short prayer in Polish; then she jumped up to bring warm plates from the oven for Dan and Chris, and to whisk away cold but priceless ones that had been Chris' grandmother's in Pozen, saying, matter-of-factly: "I put them on just to show Dan it is no lie that every Pole is of noble blood, either on his mother's or his father's side."

"And every Irishman is descended from a king," said Dan Bergan, pouring rich brown gravy over his mashed potatoes. "And a fighting king, at that, I'll have you know."

Chris had no comment until he had finished a second helping of roast pork and frugally wiped up all the gravy on his plate with a bread crust.

"The world has seen too much quarreling and fighting," he finally said, wagging his head slowly. "If it doesn't find some kindness in its heart soon, it will be too late."

"I'm for somebody else besides you having a kind heart, for a change," said Lena incisively. "I'm getting tired of everybody stealing your brains and getting all the credit and big money for what is yours. It's a cheat, and I don't care who hears I said it."

"You mustn't say that in front of our best friend, Mamma," said Chris in a mildly shocked tone. "He might think you meant his own son, too." He spread his hands. "Remember this is America. If I never earned another penny so long as we live, we would always have more than your mother's cousin who is a nobleman back in the Old Country. I mean the one we send a food package to every month, and my old Sunday suit that he said was the finest he saw in church, last Easter."

"I am still going to feel mad, whenever anybody cheats you," said Lena, and looked to Dan Bergan—receiving his nod of approval and relaying it triumphantly to Chris. "See? Dan is your friend too. If you won't be mad for yourself, it is no sin for you to have your friends mad for you." Then slipping easily out of her husband's way of thinking and speaking, she turned to Dan. "What burns me up is the last fast one they have pulled on Chris and his mill. It's about that big order for high-test silicon transformer iron that the Company got, last month from Great Eastern Electric."

"What's that, again?" said Dan, halting a forkload of custard pie halfway to his mouth; for to his certain knowledge the Great Eastern Electric had not deigned to give the Company a pound of its large transformer iron business for the past fifteen years.

"Just what I said," nodded Lena, who knew all about the ancient feud between the Company and its largest potential customer for the product of her husband's mill—not the Company's mill, to her way of thinking, be it clearly understood. "It is an order for higher-test silicon sheet than anybody has ever made before."

"That's why Great Eastern gave the order to us," said Chris sardonically.

"NONSENSE," said Lena. "Chris could make it, only the main office wouldn't give his mill the job, because they are getting a big-profit price for it. So what do they do but split the order between Lakeside and the main plant."

"And then send for Chris and ask him to cut his own throat by showing 'em how to make it," interjected Dan, bending a commanding eye on Chris. "Ain't that so?"

"It was orders from the front office," said Chris. "Sure, I went and showed them all I knew."

"They've lost six heats, already, trying to make it in the other mills," said Lena, making no attempt to conceal her satisfaction over the loss entailed in melting nearly five hundred tons of steel that had failed to meet the specifications of the customer.

"Nobody can make steel to that high-test specification," said Chris, wagging his head. "The Great Eastern made a fool of our sales department when it accepted the order. I know, because where Great Eastern

"They've lost six heats trying to make it," said Lena.

told that new salesman of ours they were getting it from a competitor's mill, they wasn't no such thing. They played the Company for a sucker."

"Sure, nobody but you can make it," insisted Lena. "But you, Chris Majewski—you could make it in a skillet on the back of my stove with the gas shut off—like it was last winter when the pressure went down and all the gas in the pipes was being used at your mill to melt steel."

"Mmmm," said Dan. "Are you still burning natural gas in your open hearth furnaces, Chris—that same old low-sulphur gas we used to get?"

At Chris' nod of confirmation, Dan pushed back his chair, to declare his intention of beating them both in a game of pinochle.

After trouncing him unmercifully in three straight games, Lena laughed and said, teasingly: "You play just like Mollie said you did when you were courting her—and your head up in the clouds, some place."

Later that night, relaxed in the billowy feather bed in the guest-room, Dan lay with a scheming smile on his face that boded no good news for all and sundry—including the board of directors of the Company—who might have the rashness to cross an Irishman, and a descendant of kings, in consequence, when his mind was made up on a matter.

At six o'clock breakfast next morning Dan Bergan saved his breath for cooling his coffee, volunteering no small talk, except to remark upon inquiry by Lena that he had slept like an innocent babe the night through.

But when he followed Chris to the door, Lena pinched his arm and winked happily at him, saying: "When an Irishman stops talking, it's a sign his friends in bad trouble will soon hear good news."

"And their enemies none," said Dan, clapping his hat on his head at a gayly truculent angle and following Chris out to the garage.

WALKING with Chris through the works on the first inspection tour of the day, Dan stopped on the charging floor and ran his eye along the row of open-hearth furnaces in various stages of making steel.

"Hey, Chris," he shouted in his companion's ear. "Which one is it that has a slag-notch? Number Six?"

"How did you know that?" asked Chris blankly.

"Come out of this racket, where we can talk instead of howling like banshees at each other," said Dan, leading his man off to a quiet spot. "Because I remember yelling my head off, fifteen years ago, at the extra expense of that slag notch, when you was building Number Six," he said, in answer to Chris's previous question. Then, with a long, bony finger he stirred an imaginary brew in an equally imaginary witch's caldron. "Just like I set up half the night figuring it was."

Suddenly he clapped a quizzical eye on his sober-faced friend. "Chris, m'lad, it would be no more than a common accident—*accident*, mind—if the plug in that slag-notch burned out, for once, and all the slag on a certain batch of steel just happened to run off the minute you was ready to tap the heat."

"Don't speak of bad luck this early in the morning," begged Chris uneasily. "I got enough, already."

"So, instead of breaking your neck to get a ladle ready and tapping off an unkilled heat," insinuated Dan, ignoring the interruption, "you tell the boys to cover the bath of steel with a good thick blanket of lime—"

"Lime—are you crazy in the head?" demanded Chris, shocked at the heresy. "Look, lime won't melt down and form a blanket of slag—not at no temperature the furnace lining will stand." He ended with an authoritative gesture of dissent. "We don't do crazy things like that, no more, since the Company hires a mob of chemists to check every heat."

"Don't interrupt an Irishman when his brains are working out loud," said Dan sternly, and went on to expand

his scheme. "With the lime blanket on the hot steel bath, and as hot a sulphur-free flame as you can coax out of her, in no time at all the lime will take up all the sulphur in the steel, and the dissolved iron oxides along with it. Then you'll have practically nothing but pure iron, that you can boost with ferro-silicon to any analysis that you think will get you a batch of high-test transformer steel. See anything wrong with that?"

Chris shook his head. "I can't make a special heat, without permission from the main office. That would be the excuse they've been waiting for—"

"The hell you can't," snorted Dan. "In the steel business, there's bound to be accidents. And when there's an accident, the thing to do is save the batch in the best condition possible. And this batch we'll save in better condition than any heat of transformer iron anybody's ever made, anywhere." Then, forgetting for the moment that it had been ten years since he had had the authority to issue a peremptory order to Chris, he waved his arm and said: "Now get out there and do like I tell you. And if anybody gives you any lip about it, afterward, tell 'em, swell, you got a job waiting for you in Wheeling, at twice the lousy pay you're getting. Get going!"

A SLOW but determined grin dispelled the dubious and stubborn frown on Chris Majewski's face. He nodded once. "Good. Number Six will have a break-out through the slag notch. Everybody but you forgot she had one. Then when I get the report from the electrical lab that the heat tests better than point four-five, like that Big E order specifies and nobody has been able to meet yet, I call the main office and ask whatinell to do with this accident-heat we had to save the best way we could."

With the gesture of an Irish king, Dan unhooked his huge gold watch from its chain and handed it to Chris. "If the main office don't come right back and beg you on its knees to cook 'em two more heats of the same—why, throw my watch, that Andy Carnegie himself give me, into the next ladle of steel you tap. . . . But make 'em crawl to you! Remember, your great-grandfather was cousin to a king!"

But during the time between eight o'clock that morning and five that night—when Dan appeared at his son Steve's home, to the mad delight of his two grandchildren and their mother Ellen—all historical record of Dan's whereabouts is not for publication. However, some inkling of the shenanigans may be deduced from the remarks subsequently exchanged between father and son, when Steve came home from the main works to dinner:

"I'm getting old and forgetful," said Dan shamelessly. "I forget whether it's tomorrow the board of directors was to decide about closing down Chris's mill, or tomorrow, a week."

"As if you didn't know that your old crony of the Fourth Ward, the honorable president of the board of works, Mike Groggin, didn't call up Simpson and tell him he was bedfast with a lame back and couldn't attend the board meeting tomorrow!"

"Poor Mike," sighed Dan piously. "Then there'll be no board meeting nor no bad news for Chris, until tomorrow a week, anyways."

Big Steve Bergan eyed his father with a mixed look of profound admiration and alert suspicion for a long moment, before remarking: "I've only got Rudy Miller's word for this, but a police sergeant's word is considered reliable around here. Rudy flagged down my car going through town and asked me if it was really you that he saw going into Garrity's with Mike, about four this afternoon."

Dan drew the back of his hand across his lips and frowned warningly in the direction of his two grandchildren. "Ahem! Garrity's *ice-cream* parlor, you mean? Well, maybe it was the drugstore, next to it, for a mustard plaster for my old friend Mike's aching back."

Steve gave his father a playful punch in the stomach that might have felled a less hardy man of half his age, and went out of the room in answer to Ellen's call to carve the roast for dinner.

That night, after he'd exercised his privilege of tucking his grandchildren into bed, Ellen met him on the stair landing and said: "I'm getting worried about Steve, Father Dan. Something has been going wrong at the mills, for weeks now. He walks the floor half the night, sometimes. It's probably something that you'd know the answer to in a minute, if you could get him to tell you about it."

Dan gave his daughter-in-law's hand a comforting pat. "The Bergans are a stiff-necked lot, lass. They ask help from no man. But leave it to me. I'll pull the young cub out of it by the scruff of his neck; and so gentle, not an important bone in his body will get broke doing it. . . . Now drag him off to the movies, and I'll watch over the little ones."

In an unconscious gesture Ellen pressed a hand over her heart and smiled with a confusion of trust and apprehension up at Dan. "I know it always comes out beautifully in the end. But—but every time you and Steve—I mean, it *looks* as if you're about to smash the furniture over each other's heads. Only—well, it just never happens."

"I want none of that kind of argument with a man the heft of my son," said Dan dryly, as he glanced musingly at his own two still powerful hands while adding: "And I give him credit for horse sense enough to keep his hands to himself when we're breaking the back of an argument between us." He waved imperiously. "Skip along to the movies with him, now."

Twice during the evening, while Steve and Ellen were out, Dan fumbled for his big gold watch that he had given as a pledge to Chris. But he waited in vain for a telephone call from Tisonville. . . . Nor was there any good news on Thursday; or during the rest of the week, for that matter, until around four on Saturday.

Dan was sitting in the parlor with a flattering miniature image of himself, in little Danny, on one knee, and Maureen on the other with her cheek resting blissfully on the lapel of his coat, when a car door slammed outside.

Next, Ellen came pattering down the hall stairs, her cheeks flushed and her eyes sparkling. She blew Dan a kiss, on her way to the kitchen door.

"Steve's come home—*whistling!*" she exclaimed breathlessly. And then Dan was alone, to make what sense he could of the news.

Steve came into the room, with a child in each arm feverishly rifling his pockets for their customary Saturday-night present. And Ellen came too, with one arm somehow finding room under her tall, grinning husband's arm as she tried to tear the tissue paper from a tiny package.

"And I've got something for you," said Steve, partially disengaging one hand and offering a small square box to Dan.

"Hmm," drawled Dan suspiciously, weighing the gift-box in his palm, "There'll be trouble over this if it ain't something I can tell your mother was for the both of us."

"It's from Chris," said Steve, with the look of a man holding his cards against his vest and itching to be called. "He gave it to me, at the board of directors' meeting this morning."

Dan measured his son from toe to enigmatic grin with cold reserve.

"MIKE GROGGIN'S promise I had, there would be none of that going on till next Wednesday, and I was to have my say about shutting down the Barling Works. The reason had better be good."

"I need that rubber band around the box for Maureen's hair ribbon," said Ellen, and used that as an excuse to slip between Steve and his father and take the box from Dan's hand. She had to peek inside, naturally. "Why, Father Dan, it's your watch!"

"So it is," said Dan unconcernedly—outwardly, that is—taking it and snapping it back on his chain. "I was wondering why I walked gimp-legged on that side."

With a broad grin big Steve said, "Okay, you conniver! I'm ready to eat crow. Throw it to me."

"Does anyone in this house speak English?" inquired Ellen in the prim tone of a professional census enumerator. Then more to the point: "What *are* you two talking about?"

"He means," said Dan, flapping a hand toward Steve, "that Chris Majewski and his broke-down steel works, that the Big Hats was fixing to throw out on the slag dump, has made a hundred-ton heat of trick steel, like nobody ever made before."

"ONE heat?" snorted Steve, batting the disparaging gesture back at his father with a violent sweep of his palm. "Hell, he's made three, hand-running. Everyone of them tests three points better than contract specifications. You should have seen the Big Hats handshaking with Chris at the board meeting today, and poking fifty-cent cigars in his pockets."

"And pumping him dry as a keg the morning after a wedding party, for how he did it in them old coffee-roasters of his," grunted Dan, clamping an accusing eye on his son. "I'll bet a plug hat, with me standin' in my head in it in front of the City Hall, you took it all down in writing—so you could swipe his stuff from under him for Lakeside and the main works."

"I tried that, and lost myself three hundred-twenty-ton heats," confessed Steve disgustedly. "I tapped off the slag blanket and covered the bath with lime, but I couldn't knock the sulphur down the way Chris does."

"So you got naught for your thievin', eh, m'lad?" Dan flung back his head and let out a roaring laugh. Then with a barbed twinkle in his eye he leaned forward in his chair, adding: "What's it worth to the Company to know the gimmick of how Chris gets rid of the sulphur?"

Steve flung up both arms. "Almost any price you can name. Man alive, at the price people are willing to pay for high-silicon electrical sheet of better than a point four-five core loss, even the Barling Works would be a gold mine."

"Then I'll spill the gimmick," said Dan, apparently having a sudden change of heart.

"This is going to cost me my shirt and half my hide with it," said Big Steve, winking down at Ellen. Then to his father: "Let's have it, you body-snatcher."

"All you do to make this point four-five stuff as good as Chris," explained Dan, feet outstretched before him and his thumbs hooked in the armholes of his vest, "is use sulphur-free gas to heat your furnaces, the way he does."

"You might just as well tell me to get my lime from the moon," retorted Steve disgustedly. "It would cost ten million, easy, to rebuild the coke plants at Lakeside and the main works to make sulphur-free gas."

Illustrated by Grattan Condon

"I'm worried about Steve, Father Dan. Something has been going wrong at the mills."

"Sure," said Dan, sprinkling the salt of authoritative confirmation upon the bleeding wounds of his son. "But for a lousy five million, Chris could rebuild his whole open-hearth furnace line and furnish all the billets the Company can roll into sheet at the other two plants."

Dan reached in his pocket and pulled out the expensive survey that had condemned the Barling Works for immediate dismantling. He tossed it at his son. "Throw that in the furnace and get a nickel's worth of heat out o' it."

Ellen emitted a long sigh of relief, and said, "Thank goodness!" which could have meant a hundred different things, and slipped out to the kitchen to prepare supper.

Dan got up and went out into the front hall, where he put in a long-distance telephone call to Florida. "Is that you, Mollie? . . . Yes, it's me, and there's no bones broke in the family—just a few pieces of busted screwy ideas throwed on the slag pile . . . Now mind what I'm telling you. Drive down to the fish wharf and buy me a new pail of bait. Meet me at the flying-machine parking-lot, at ten tomorrow morning—and we'll finish that important business we started last Monday. G'night, lass."

GRUDGINGLY, Steve pulled from his pocket a large handful of expensive cigars and stuffed them into Dan's breast pocket.

Dan sniffed one of the cigars and nodded approvingly. "Aye; fit for a king, they are. You're a dutiful son, Steve, m'lad, with a heart softer than your tongue."

"Don't thank me," said Steve dourly, then gave his father a thumping bang on the shoulder. "I swiped them out of the box that the directors were passing down the line to Chris, after the board meeting today."

"Then they draw the better for it," said Dan. "For it's no sin to swipe four-bit cigars from the Polish nobility."

Change the name of Arkansas? Hell, *no*! And the way of a mule with a man is hard to change too.

by HORACE BRYAN

Eyes for Jenny

IN the half-light of dawn, several hundred men milled about the entrance of the old Black Pigeon mine, in the center of her tall dumps. Slim Jim stopped before the man who had been pointed out to him as pit-boss.

"Ain't got a lonesome jenny, have ye?" he asked.

The pit-boss took one long look at the tall one before him. The black-snake mule-whip draped around his neck marked him as a wandering mule-driver, so the pit-boss asked no questions. "The boss-driver is down at the pen—he'll fix you up," he said.

When the work-whistle blasted the hills, Slim Jim swung on the cage with other members of the crew and plunged four hundred and sixty-eight feet down the jug-neck to the bottom of the shaft. The smoky flames of their tallow wicks flickered as the crew scattered to their work places in the extremities of the narrow passages.

Slim Jim walked over to the mule-pen where the mule-power of the huge ancient workings had been stalled for three generations. Not one animal in the herd of sixty had seen daylight since they were brought below as colts. Their eyes had long since ceased to respond to the pale glow of tallow—that, and the flame of blasting fires and the flash of fire-damp, was the only thing resembling daylight in this underground dungeon.

The drivers were catching out their mules; and Granny Tabor, the boss-driver, was standing at the gate. "The pit-boss said you'd gimme a jenny an' show me where to chase it," Slim Jim informed him.

The boss-driver stood gaping, as he looked the tall frame of the mule-driver over from head to foot—and speculated as to just how high he was. Then a slight smile crept over his face, and a mischievous light came into his eyes. "I reckon I can accommodate you," he said.

"Wal, show me to 'er," the driver requested, impatient with the delay caused by Granny's speculations.

The boss-driver's grin broadened as he glanced toward a knotty little creature standing at the far side of the pen, her head hung sleepily over the barbed wire. "That's her over there," he said, nodding his head in her direction.

Slim Jim took a halter from the rack and waited at the gate as the last of the drivers filed out with their mules and scattered down the passages.

"What's the critter's name?"

Granny Tabor chuckled secretively. "For short," he said, "we call her sweet little Jenny Blue Kate."

The driver stepped inside the gate. "Come 'ere, Blue Kate," he called. The mule stirred, raised her head, flicked her long ears, then dropped her chin back over the fence.

"Blue Kate," he shouted sharply, "I said come 'ere." The mule roused again, stamped the rock floor with her hoofs, brayed without enthusiasm, and relaxed again into her slumbers.

The driver walked slowly over toward the mule. "Blue Kate, the sooner ye learn to mind," he said, "the better off we're both gonna be."

"You'd better be careful there, Slim," the boss-driver warned.

"She'd best be careful herself," he replied, continuing to walk toward her. Blue Kate's ears stood at half-mast and she swung her tail in undisturbed fashion. "Easy now, gal," he coaxed.

He raised his hand and laid it lightly on her shoulder. The little mule let out a sudden angry squeal, bolted and whirled in the air, and drove her heels at him. The mule-driver's long legs coiled and uncoiled, like steel springs; one long leap threw him safely out of the way of the driving hoofs. Blue Kate snorted and shook her head, as if unable to explain the inaccuracy of her aim, and trotted to the other side of the pen.

A long laugh rang out from Granny Tabor and echoed back from against

Blue Kate

Illustrated by John Fulton

the hollow walls. "I told you to watch her," he said. "She's the meanest damned jenny this side of hell."

Slim Jim smiled with satisfaction. "Wal, I never liked a dead jenny, nohow," he chuckled. "Gimme one with a burr in 'er tail."

"You'd better give her a taste of rawhide," Granny advised.

"No," Slim returned, "I never liked to introduce myself to a jenny with a blacksnake." He was approaching her again. "Easy, gal—easy. . . . Good nice Blue Kate." She bolted and raced away, this time before he got in reach of her.

"Take the rawhide to her," Granny shouted.

Slim Jim pitched his halter to the gate, his blacksnake uncoiled from around his neck and cracked in the air. "Looks like ye got it comin', gal," he said, "—much as I hate to do it."

"That's the medicine," the boss-driver shouted. "But mind you, I would advise a fence between the two of you before you start."

The tall mule-driver ignored the advice. His arm swung and his wrist twisted—the plaited rawhide uncoiled, and the cat-o'-nine-tails at its end raised the hair on the tender side of the mule's stomach. She squealed, whirled and reared and charged forward on her hindlegs, her forefeet pounding the air.

Slim Jim leaped aside, avoiding the charge of the blind mule. His blacksnake shot out and came forward, ringing like a gunshot across her rump. Blue Kate squealed again and retreated to the far side of the barbed-wire enclosure.

"Ha-ha-oo," Granny Tabor gasped. "Give her the rawhide. Ha-ha-oo-oh." He fell to his knees and grasped his stomach, cramped with his laughter. "Watch her, Slim. Ho-hooo!"

"She's got a burr in 'er tail, a'right," Slim said, delighted. He approached the mule again cautiously, his whip coiled in his hand. He threw it forward, and it uncoiled its full length in the air and re-coiled about her neck.

Blue Kate started to bolt, but he threw his weight against the whip, now securely coiled about her neck like a rope, and held her head toward him. Then he leaped and grabbed her about the neck with his long arms. She fought and kicked and squealed, trying to break loose, but his iron grip held her as if she were a day-old colt. As she struggled, he chuckled with delight and petted her neck and deluged her with kind words. "Easy, gal—easy. Nice jenny—"

Granny choked off his laughing mania, crawled back on his feet, and stared unbelievingly at the scene before him. "Watch her, Slim—watch her," he warned, still expecting the mule at any moment to pounce upon him with her steel-shod hoofs.

Slim Jim urged Blue Kate nearer the gate, patting and rubbing her neck and shoulders. "Nice jenny—nice good jenny Blue Kate."

Blue Kate quieted, and he threw her collar and hames on her. Then he turned and started leading the way down the entry. "Come on, gal," he called.

Blue Kate did not budge. He coaxed and pleaded, trying to get her to follow, but she only slung her head and stamped the floor.

Granny was disgusted. "Slim, you can't handle that jenny that way," he said.

"Once me an' Blue Kate get an understandin'," Slim replied, "then we'll be like the lamb an' the lion."

"If you get through the day without gettin' your brains kicked out, you'll be doin' better than any other driver that's ever tried to handle her."

"I don't believe she's a bad mule at heart," Slim said. "She's just been mistreated, that's all, an' she's too damned good a jenny to take it."

"Well, I'm warnin' you," Granny said, finally. "She'll kick an' paw, she'll bite an' butt, she'll balk an' run away—she's meaner than the devil himself."

The driver stepped back, took Blue Kate's halter, and started leading her down the passage. "We'll get along fine," he shouted back over his shoulder, "after she learns who's boss."

As they came out with the first trip of loaded coal-cars, Blue Kate balked on the grade. Slim Jim begged and

pleaded, trying to get her to pull, but she wouldn't even tighten her tail-chain. He finally got mad and threatened her with his blacksnake. Still she refused to lean against the cars.

Slim was getting riled beyond righteousness by that time. He leaped over behind the trip, threw his huge shoulders against the cars, and shoved them up against Blue Kate's heels. The mule had never seen a trip roll uphill and on top of her before; she snorted with surprise and fright, and laid back her ears and took off. In a half-dozen jumps she was in a dead run, but the giant mule-driver still had the cars bumping her heels. When they went over the rise and down on the other side, he did not sprag up a single wheel. The grade was so steep that it was customary for the driver to sprag-lock one wheel on each car.

The trip roared all the way down the hill, so close upon the mule that it was clipping her rear. The tall mule-driver was swinging on the rear of the last car, laughing and shouting, "Run, ye rascal, run! That'll teach ye not to balk on me."

KATE, thereafter, was careful where she balked on Slim Jim. But every time he broke her of one mean trick, she seemed to have two more in stock with which to plague him. "You ornery critter," he said, exasperated, "I never saw yer match before."

In the afternoon they brought a trip to a stop on the parting near the main slope. Slim stepped in behind the mule to release her tail-chain from the front car. She suddenly doubled up, let out one of her squeals, and sent her heels flying at him.

But he was not asleep; his legs propelled him out of the way, and her hoofs splintered the wooden dump-door in the front of the car. "Ye rascal," Slim shouted. His long leg shot out, and his booted foot sank into her ribs. She snorted and turned her tail-end to him again. Her steel-shod hoofs bit into the coal wall against which he had been standing.

"Two can play that game," Slim cried. He braced his back against a prop, threw his foot against the mule's side and kicked with all his might. She landed on the other side in the refuse pile below the track.

Blue Kate snorted and shook herself, and when she scrambled to her feet, she walked back into the middle of the track and stood there as tame as a lamb. "Now, that's a good girl," he said. "Ye're learnin' fast." He picked up her tail-chain and drove her up to the empty trip. There he stooped to fasten the tail-chain again.

Blue Kate quietly raised her left hoof, laid it up gently against the seat of his pants, and shove-kicked him headlong into the empty bed of the first car. Then she snorted and laid back her ears, and started running full speed down the entry.

The driver scrambled up in the car, adjusted the lamp-cap on his head, and seated himself comfortably. "Ye're breakin' my heart, Kate," he complained. "Ye don't seem to understand what fair treatment means."

They had been together about a week when the trip got away on the grade. Neither was any worse off, after that week together, except for a few stripes, skins and bruises, hoof-prints, and other abrasions. That trip getting away wasn't anybody's fault especially—it was just one of those things. It started when the sprags which Slim had thrown into the wheels, to act as brakes, were broken and stripped. The trip, a double-header, roared faster and faster down the grade, leaving a streak of fire along the steel rails. Then there was a crash of steel and wood against coal and rocks, as the cars left the rails and stacked against the solid wall.

Granny Tabor was sitting on the parting, waiting for Slim, when the crash came. "Jimminy-jenkins," he shouted, "that wreck spelled the end of a man an' a mule."

He raced up the track, expecting to find both Slim Jim and Blue Kate dead. Instead he found them in the middle of the track fighting like two Turks. Slim had her down, flat on her side, his arms about her neck and his long legs locked about her body. She was kicking and squealing wildly.

Granny examined the mule's shoulders, like a referee at a wrestling match. "Awright, Slim, let her up," he then instructed. "Looks like you're the winner."

He loosened his grip and the mule scrambled to her feet. "That oughta teach 'er who's boss," Slim said.

"Yeah, if that trip hadn't jumped the track," Granny declared, "it would have made sausage outa both of you."

"Wal, next time I holler whoa, maybe she'll stop."

"It's a crazy jenny that won't run with a wild trip on her heels."

"But it wasn't on her heels when I hollered whoa," Slim Jim explained. "When I saw that it was gonna run over 'er, before we reached the level, I slewed it off the track. Then I hollers whoa. But she just keeps runnin'. I decided that it was time to manhandle 'er again."

"You oughta used your blacksnake on her," Granny advised.

"I never liked to whip a jenny with a blacksnake," Slim said. "Ye gotta be fair with yer jenny if ye expect it to be fair with you."

SLIM never took advantage of his mule. And he was always just as fair with his work buddies. But it was long hours and low pay for the man or the mule that crossed Slim Jim. He was good-natured and easy-going, but when he was riled, he was riled from head to toe—six feet six inches of hell! He was approaching the riling-point with Blue Kate. Fair and kind treatment wasn't making her a good mule. Instead, it seemed that she was getting meaner every day. She was continually throwing her hoofs at him, trying to bite him, balking, or running away when his back was turned. He couldn't understand it.

ONE day when the regular mine crew wasn't working, he appeared at the mine top and told the pit-boss that he wanted to go below. He was lowered on the cage and went over and took a seat by the mule-pen, his back against a prop. He had taken a seat facing Blue Kate, but she stood with her head over the fence and her only recognition of his presence was a slight flip of her right ear.

"I can't make ye out, Kate," he said, solemnly. "I been treatin' ye fair an' square. I ain't never laid the rawhide on ye but once—that was to let ye know I had a blacksnake an' knew how to use it. Since then, when we tangled, it's been a fair fight, hand to hoof an' the best man win."

Kate wiggled both her ears, stamped one foot, and went on with her slumbers. He sat silently, thinking. The blind eyes of the mule came to his attention, and he sat looking at them for some time.

"I guess it's pretty bad bein' thrown in this hole with none of God's sunlight till ye go stone blind. An' you've been beaten by a mean mule-driver till ye don't trust nobody. An' I guess bein' beaten, an' bein' blind, an' bein' left in this wet hole is pretty bad. . . . Yeah, it's pretty bad an' I ain't sayin' that I blame ye much for bein' mean."

Slim got up and paced back and forth, his hands locked behind his bent back. "Yeah, that's pretty bad, Kate," he repeated, "an' I ain't sayin' I blame ye for bein' mean."

Suddenly the tall mule-driver halted his pacing. He turned and looked at Blue Kate. He said: "I got an idea, gal. An' by George, ye'd better show some appreciation. I'm gonna take ye outa here—out where ye can pick a little green grass an' switch yer tail at the flies." He whirled and started running toward the cage at the shaft bottom. "After this ye'd better be a different jenny," he said, more to himself than to the mule.

The pit-boss never heard of such a crazy idea—bringing a mule out of the mine at the end of every day's work. Slim Jim, however, just refused to take no for an answer, and immediately started building a shed and pen for her near the mine entrance. The next day that the mine worked, he led her to the cage at the end of the shift and loaded her on.

"This is where I said whoa the first time," he informed her.

"Yes sir, Jenny Blue Kate," he said, as the cage shot upward, "ye'd better show some appreciation fer this."

The next afternoon, while Slim was pulling his sprags from a trip which they had just landed on the parting, Blue Kate made a break for the old mule-pen near the shaft bottom.

"Whoa—who-oa, gal," he yelled. She hit a gallop; but he chased her down, grabbed her tail-chain, and started dragging her back toward the parting. The tug-o'-war between them lasted for over thirty minutes.

Finally he got her back to the parting. Then he threw her down and held her until she stopped wiggling. "This is where I said whoa the first time," he informed her, "an' this is where ye ought to have stopped."

He remained sitting on Blue Kate's side for some time, studying and feeling mighty bad. "I give up, gal," he said. "Despite all I've done ye get meaner an' meaner every day."

He finally rose and she scrambled to her feet. Then he slowly and deliberately uncoiled his blacksnake from around his neck. His wrist twisted and it cracked like a pistol shot.

"Hear that, Jenny?" he questioned. "From now on I'm a mean mule-driver. The next time ye get mean with me I'm gonna whip you with this rawhide till ye get down on yer prayerful knees."

Blue Kate gave Slim no more trouble that afternoon. When the shift was over he took her out and put her in the pen. While he was feeding her, the miners who had gathered to watch noticed that she was following him about, close upon his heels.

"She's followin' Slim like a baby chick followin' the ol' hen," they shouted, laughing and pounding their thighs with their open hands. Annoyed by the persistent mule at his heels, he rushed to the gate, trying to leave her behind. But before he could close the gate, she had pushed through. Determined to be rid of her, he started running across the mine top toward the wash-house, winding around buildings and in and out among the coal-cars on the siding track. But the little blind mule, her sharp ears following each footstep, kept close upon the heels of the tall mule-driver.

The miners were doubled up, holding their stomachs, cramped with laughter. "She couldn't do no better with her own eyes," they said.

Granny Tabor finally came running over with a lasso, threw it over her head, and led her back to the pen and locked her up. Slim Jim went to his wash-shack, had a bath, and changed to his clean clothes. Then he went back to the mule-pen.

Blue Kate sensed his presence and came over and hung her head over the fence near him. "She's used to you guidin' her down below, Slim," an old miner said. "Up here everything is strange an' she don't feel safe except when she's followin' in your tracks."

Slim glanced toward Granny, who was still guarding the gate. "I think I'll take my jenny," he announced.

"What ya mean, take her?" Granny asked.

"Take 'er with me—take care of 'er," Slim said.

"Hell, she ain't your jenny—belongs to the company," Granny returned.

Slim Jim was in no humor to argue. He grabbed the boss-driver by the seat of the pants and threw him up on top of the mule shed. Then he threw open the gate and stalked away, with Blue Kate close upon his heels.

Blue Kate, thereafter, was Slim Jim's jenny. So long as there was a job for a man and a mule about a coal-mine, they always worked together. She always followed like a dog at his heels, as they wandered from mine to mine and from camp to camp. The reputation they established is known all over the coal-fields: it was said that they could pull more coal in a shift than three ordinary man-mule teams.

"Blue Kate needed some eyes, an' I needed a jenny," Slim Jim always explained, "so we took up together. She's been a good jenny, since she ain't blind no more."

A maddened bellow escaped Condoulet; in blind fury he sent his horse at Vergy.

The Reward of

CATHERINE DE MEDICI COVETED THE SPHINX EMERALD. AND WHEN THE KING GAVE IT AS A REWARD TO HIS PHYSICIAN, DR. NOTREDAME RODE IN DIRE PERIL OF HIS LIFE.

THE Comte de Vergy, Royal Equerry, intimate friend of the King, and easily the most influential noble at court, was a handsome, swaggering, arrogant fellow—not half clever, but apt at worming himself forward. One of his methods was to pay much quiet attention to the little Italian princess Catherine de Medici, who would be Queen of France one of these days.

Catherine was extremely plain, but was clever enough to invent the side-saddle in order to display her one beauty, a well-formed leg. She was highly superstitious, like any girl of nineteen; and having few friends at court, she welcomed the courtesies of Vergy, and ultimately made him her confidant in the matter of the Sphinx emerald.

Catherine and her husband the Dauphin were on hand because the King was believed dying. This was in the summer of 1538. King François had come to Orléans because of its healthy air, and occupied the huge Hôtel Groslot.

Incurably ill, outworn by his vices, François was doomed and accounted dying; but while he lived, he was very much King of France.

Illustrated by Maurice Bower

Nostradamus

by H. BEDFORD - JONES

Of an afternoon, Catherine sat in her apartment, sewing, her attendant ladies at a little distance, while Vergy sat with her, fingering a lute as he talked. Demure as a mouse, careful to avoid scandal, keeping herself well out of the court picture, Catherine saw everything that went on. Despised as an Italian by the incredibly haughty French nobles, she was ever on the defensive, and was most careful to shun their jealousy and envy.

"And you, M. de Vergy, do you think the King will die?" she was asking.

"They say his physician, Maître Guillaume Chrétien, has given up hope," he said, pulling a sad face.

She smiled faintly as she eyed him "If only someone would do something for me—something wicked, perhaps," she sighed, "he might ask any favor in his heart and find it granted—some day."

The significance of her words could not be missed. Vergy met her eyes—and promptly laid aside his lute.

"I am that someone, madame," he said softly. "And I can be discreet as the dead."

"An ill omen—be careful, my friend!" She frowned slightly. "You know the necklace His Majesty usually wears?"

"Certainly, madame. A gold chain made for him by Cellini; pendent on this chain is an emerald of size, but poor in color."

"*The* emerald, the Sphinx emerald," she breathed. "The most wondrous I ever saw!"

Vergy shrugged lightly. "One is like another, to me."

"Not to me, monsieur." Her dark eyes lit up; excitement flushed her olive cheek. "More, that stone is rightly mine, belongs to me! The King gave it to me when I came from Italy to be wedded. I wore it, came to cherish it dearly—and then he took it back. He borrowed it from me—and kept it. He refuses to part with it, and laughs at me when I beg for it back. And I must have it, monsieur—I cannot lose it—I must not, I will not!"

Vergy, scenting intrigue and high profit, was all attention. He was not a bad sort, but high-tempered, an expert swordsman, and keenly ambitious.

"Suppose," she went on under her breath, "suppose he—he should die?"

"Then you, madame, will be Queen of France."

She gestured impatiently. "I am thinking of the emerald. You know what will happen. A mad scramble for jewels, for gold, for power—his mistresses seizing what they can, his attendants grabbing at everything within reach!"

"If you rascals were any good, you'd be able to relieve the pain instead of feeding me vile concoctions which effect nothing," said the King.

From her ladies came laughter at some jest; Vergy murmured:

"Madame, I comprehend—say no more! I shall make myself responsible for that chain and pendant. It shall be my privilege to see that it comes safely to you. Is there any person of your suite whom I can trust, in case of need?"

"Lorenzo," she breathed, and looked up. "Here he comes now."

Lorenzo approached. He was one of the few Italians left in her service, his position being too humble to attract French jealousy. He was one of the grooms—a dark-visaged fellow with crafty eyes, lean and scarred of face. He bowed profoundly to Catherine, delivered a message, and departed cringingly.

"Is that man in your confidence, madame?" Vergy asked incredulously.

She assented. "He is more than he seems, a very able Florentine. He serves me."

The ladies approached. Vergy rose, bowed, and took ceremonious leave.

"Farewell, madame. I repeat, you may rely absolutely upon me."

Catherine looked after him, hiding a smile in her dark eyes. . . .

On the following evening Vergy stood in the royal antechamber with a group of courtiers. He looked at two soberly clad men who had just entered, their birettas or square bonnets proclaiming them master physicians.

"Who," demanded Vergy, "is that short red-cheeked fellow with Guillaume Chrétien, the King's physician?"

Glances were directed at the pair, and one of the group made response.

"Oh, that's a country doctor from Provence—M. de Notredame, I think the name is. Another of these rascally medicos who hopes to cure the King. I hope he pulls His Majesty together enough so that we can return to Blois; I hate this accursed rathole."

IN those days France had no capital. The focal point of the realm was wherever the King happened to be, and François was ever restless, ever changing his residence. There was no royal palace at Orléans, but one place was as good as another to die in.

Chrétien, the King's physician, was famous in his own right, but no less so than his friend and colleague, with whom he stood talking. Formerly professor at Montpellier, greatest college of medicine in Europe, Michel de Notredame had thrown up his position in order to combat the fearful pestilence raging in Provence. He had come north to Orléans for a few days only, to purchase drugs of which he stood in dire need. As they talked, Chrétien handed him a small horn box.

"There's the prescription you wanted made up; I watched the job myself. But these simple herbs can have no effect, Michel. He's done for. That abdominal abscess will finish him. Why waste time with a mere salve of herbs?"

"Not being a great man like you, Guillaume, I seldom make predictions," said the visitor with a trace of irony. "I must work with simple things, not with such stuff as powdered pearls and horns of unicorns. How long do we wait here?"

"God knows! Until summoned. But have a care. They tell me he's sadly irritable today, flying into a passion at the least excuse—a result of his melancholic humors."

"More likely from deprivation of the goddess he has so long worshiped."

At this cynical remark, Chrétien glanced about cautiously. One must be careful in this antechamber where so many of the court gentlemen stood about; a loose word could destroy a

Amazement, even a species of fear, grew upon him the more he looked into this green lump of beryl.

man. Life was cheap; envy, jealousy, assassination were everywhere.

"True, no doubt." Chrétien spoke now in Latin, for safety's sake. "He sees beautiful women all around; both his natural vanity and his insensate desires are affected by enforced virtue. Make him no promises, I beg of you. He has tried everything known to science, without help."

"Much that was formerly known to science has been forgotten," Notredame murmured.

He was a smallish, robust man, lithe and vigorous, with broad brow, straight nose, rosy cheeks and extremely bright gray eyes above his clipped, graying beard. He had made a great name for himself fighting the plague—the same plague which had swept away his immediate family; but he did not always subscribe to the conventions of his colleagues.

"Who," he asked his friend, "is that handsome, arrogant young noble preening himself in the adulation of the throng around him?"

Chrétien looked. "That's the Comte de Vergy, present favorite of François. Rather a decent chap, but a swordsman and duelist. Why do you ask?"

"Curiosity. I have an uneasy suspicion—intuition, perhaps—that he and and I are fated to be friends—or enemies. . . . Ah, at last!"

They turned, as the doors of the inner chamber were opened, and those who had gathered for the royal *coucher* came out.

Monluc, a scarred Gascon soldier, came to the pair and bowed.

"He's ready for you, Maître Chrétien. I was sent to summon you."

Notredame was presented to the Gascon gentleman, whose face lit up.

"Oh, I've heard of you!" he exclaimed. "You're that man Nostradamus who they say has brought the plague under control down south by his magic powers!"

"They exaggerate, monsieur," said Notredame. "But we must not keep the King waiting."

They went in. This country physician knew little of courts and their ways, but was no whit awed by his surroundings. He found himself before a great figure perched in a huge bed whose curtains were partly withdrawn for the interview. This was the Valois, center of all majesty and power in the realm, master of such profligacy and splendor as France had never known—this huge, bloated, swollen shape, this face of fringing beard and pendulous dewlap and quenched eye, whose tasseled nightcap topped it like a ludicrous mocking crown. A torrent of groans and profanity poured from the lips of François.

"So here you are, miserable charlatans who pretend to cure and can only torture! Thrice-damned angels of Satan, a pox on your whole tribe! Chrétien, where's the fellow you promised to bring? Ah, I see him. . . . Step forward, you! I've heard of you, a sorcerer who conquers the plague with wizardry—"

The croaking voice failed of effort. Notredame was presented and bowed profoundly.

"Notredame—yes, that's it, Nostradamus," said François. "Do you know that sorcerers are sent to the stake? All alike—doctors, sorcerers, astrologers, damn 'em!"

"Sire, M. de Notredame desires to present Your Majesty with a new remedy which may afford relief," Chrétien said smoothly. "He is one of our most accomplished physicians, notably honored by Montpellier. I am prepared to vouch for his remedy, and for him."

"*Pardieu,* well spoken!" said the King. "There are few men for whom I'd say the same. You always were an honest rascal, Chrétien. Bring lights, here! Let me have a look at this sorcerer."

A chamberlain brought a candelabrum to the bedside, and François scrutinized the visitor with suspicious gaze.

"Remedies! There are none," he said thickly, and cursed. "This damned pain has me in the sweat of purgatory. If you rascals were any good, you'd be able to relieve it instead of feeding me vile concoctions which effect nothing."

NOTREDAME came close, looked at the King, and smiled a little.

"Sire, my remedy is a penetrating salve, not a draught. If Your Majesty will allow me to examine your pulse, I may somewhat relieve your immediate ills."

Notredame took the huge flabby hand, held it for a moment, and motioned for the other; François complied. Quietly, Notredame began to speak of Avicenna and his theories; his musical voice flowed softly on as he discussed the Moorish savants and their ideas of art and beauty—subjects which fascinated the Valois.

"*Ma foi,* I'm resting easier, indeed!" grunted the King. "Come, lean closer! Predict how long I have to live."

"With Your Majesty's permission, I'll make a more pleasing prediction. . . ."

Leaning over until his lips approached the ear of François, he murmured a few words quite inaudible to those around. The King's eyes opened to their fullest extent. A laugh rumbled through his ponderous expanse and came to rest upon his lips—such a laugh as he had not uttered in long days. For an instant he was his old jovial, charming self.

"You lie, you rogue, you lie!" he croaked.

"Pardon, Sire, it is the exact truth." Notredame drew back. "And now permit me to withdraw, while M. Chrétien applies the salve—"

"Wait!" came the order. "Will it cure me?"

"Sire, only the grace of God can effect a cure," Notredame said calmly, "but my belief is that the salve will afford great relief."

"Very well, I understand. Come, Chrétien! Here's the old belly you should know so well; work your will upon it."

The salve was applied, the interview ended. The two friends walked out together, donned cloaks and birettas, and passing the dour gaze of the Scots Guards on duty, gained the dark streets. Chrétien took his friend's arm, speaking softly.

"Michel, it was marvelous! He was like a bawling calf, and you cured him on the instant! What did you do?"

"I'm ashamed of you. Minor hurts irritate themselves into a fever that aggravates them; a calm presence, a few words to distract the mind, and they lessen in importance. You, so famous for your bedside manner, should know this."

"A king is very different; especially François. And what was the secret which worked a very miracle upon him?"

Notredame chuckled in his quiet way. "I told our good patient that tomorrow afternoon I'd give him a prescription of Avicenna's which, within a week's time, would enable him to taste all the delights of marriage without its drawbacks. I'll have to get the prescription made up in the morning."

The other clucked his tongue, horrified.

"Well—it's a risk. If the salve works, and you also accomplish this prediction, your fortune's made!"

"Many false prophecies are laid at my door," Notredame rejoined dryly, "but those which I myself utter are infallible, I assure you."

Notredame, an unassuming man who put on no airs, had not even a lackey to serve him. He had come to Orléans to purchase a stock of drugs that he needed, and Chrétien had insisted on dragging him to look at the King.

THE next day he was out early, about his business. He meant to get away as soon as he was free of the royal patient, on the morrow if possible, and get back to the plague-stricken south where he was sorely needed.

The two thousand-odd persons of the court had filled the old city of Orléans to bursting, and amid the gay rout the gray-clad figure of Notredame drew no eyes. He finished his purchases, watched a chemist put up the secret Avicenna prescription, then started home. He was passing the hostel of the Three Emperors, when a heavy hand fell on his shoulder and a tremendous voice burst forth in the Provençal tongue.

"*Saperlipopette*—Notredame, of all people! Thunders of heaven, man, embrace me!"

He was crushed in the arms of a giant—a huge red-faced, awkward, roughly clad man, no other than Sieur Palamedes Tronc de Condoulet, seigneur and wine-grower of Salon in Provence, whom he had known for years.

Notredame freed himself, laughing. "A surprise indeed, old neighbor! What are you doing here?"

"Came with a present for the King, a cask of our best wine," declared the other, with rolling rustic oaths. 'Those accursed courtiers pretend they can't understand me, and pass me from one to another and keep putting me off—"

Notredame clapped him on the back. "Listen: The King occupies the Hôtel Groslot. I'm to see him early this afternoon. Come there, ask for me or Dr. Chrétien, and we may be able to help you. Now pardon me, old friend, I must hurry to keep an appointment. We'll meet and talk later, eh? Right."

Knowing the big, kindly, somewhat dense Provençal would talk by the hour, he did not hesitate to free himself, since noon was at hand. Despite his haste, he was pleased and warmed by the meeting. A sterling fellow, Condoulet, with heart of gold.

Upon reaching home, he found Chrétien gone and no sign of lunch. He got himself some bread and cheese, and was eating it when his host burst in upon him hurriedly, with panting speech.

"Michel! He has sent for us—one of his gentlemen came—will meet us at the Hôtel Groslot. He says the King is very cheerful this morning and much better—hurry, man, get ready!"

"I'm ready. No haste. You seem astonished that all has gone well. I should be astonished if it had not."

Chrétien bustled him off. "Ah, Michel! Not even a royal command flurries you! Where did you get your eternal poise, your amazing composure? I suppose one must be born with such a gift."

"It can always be encouraged to grow. Easy, now."

With quiet words, Notredame calmed the hurried excitement of his colleague, told of meeting his old friend from Salon; and presently they reached the royal residence. Crowds of city folk were clustered outside the line of Scots Guards to get glimpses of the great, and a gentleman of the King's suite awaited them, bowing to Notredame with surprising respect.

"His Majesty is in the garden," said he, leading them into the courtyard. "He wishes to see you at once, so come this way."

They passed through the building into the garden, and as they traversed the graveled paths, it was the turn of Notredame to be surprised. A gay awning had been spread beside a marble fountain, and here sat François, talking with Manluc, Vergy and the Comte de St. Pol, the main groups of courtiers remaining at a little distance out of earshot.

And what a François it was! The groaning hulk of last evening was gone; the nightcap was replaced by a jeweled bonnet. The puffed and enormous shape was clad in a magnificent suit of white and gold; the heavy long-nosed features were laughing and radiant. The Valois was himself once more, shrewd, jovial, great-hearted, eking out his words with rapid gesticulation.

"Good day, Mâitre Chrétien," he wheezed. "Ah, Notredame, prince of magicians! Do you know that your wizard salve has banished my ills, as you promised?"

Notredame bowed. "Sire, when Dr. Chrétien approved my prescription, I knew that it could not fail."

"Neatly said, my friend. Hm! I seem to have a memory of something else, a voice whispering at my ear. An angelic voice, shall I say?"

FRANCOIS shook with laughter. Notredame advanced, and in his broad palm laid a curious little box of metal, Byzantine or Saracen work, exquisitely enameled.

"My faith!" The King, who was an excellent judge of such artistry, eyed it with quick pleasure. "What admirable enamel! Limosin himself never made better." He opened the little box and glanced at the tiny pellets it contained.

"If Your Majesty will take one pellet with each meal, or not above four a day," said Notredame, "I believe that in a week's time the prediction I made you last evening will be fulfilled."

"So?" A glint came into the shrewd, dulled old eyes. This man, like every crowned head of the period, had lived most of his life in dread of poison. "Suppose we try this noble medicine on M. de Monluc, yonder—what say you, Notredame?"

Glancing at the scarred, stalwart Gascon, Notredame smiled slightly.

"Sire, that were a pity; indeed, a very sad waste. Allow me to prove the honesty of my own medicine." So saying, he reached out, took several of the tiny pellets, and swallowed them.

François, holding his vast belly as mirth shook him, went off into a roar of laughter. Monluc grinned. The Comte de Vergy made some comment that sent the King into a fresh spasm.

"A waste, says he," came his gasping croak. "A sad waste—ha, Monluc, he has heard of your reputation among the ladies! A pity, says he. . . . Come hither, Provençal! You've done well. Upon my word, I love you! We must keep you here at court, make a place for you—eh?"

"Sire, you need me not; and Provence, smitten by the plague, does. Mâitre Chrétien has far greater skill than I."

"Ha! You scoundrelly doctors always pat one another on the back.

Your pardon, Chrétien," François added quickly. "I meant no reflection on you. God knows you're one of the few I trust with my whole heart! Come, Notredame: You've done for me what no other could do. You promise what all the others have denied. What reward seek you?"

"I do not give my help for rewards, Sire," Notredame replied, bowing. François peered at him, saw that he really meant the words, and grunted.

"So? On your knee, fellow—on your knee!" As Notredame obediently knelt, the King snatched off a chain of beautiful gold links bearing an emerald pendant. He put it over the head of Notredame. "There, my favorite of all jewels for you, man—even if it did break the heart of Leonardo the painter. Cellini made the chain for me. Take it with my blessing—if I didn't value it so highly I'd not give it to you. Mâitre Chrétien," he added, taking a ring from his finger, "accept this with my thanks. Whenever you have more friends like this man, bring them to me without delay."

AS he rose, Notredame caught a glimpse of the face of Vergy. It astonished him, so contorted was it with anger and dismay. However, thinking he must have made some mistake about it, he dismissed the matter from his mind.

Rewarded and dismissed, the two, bowing ceremoniously, backed away and left the garden, passing through the building toward the entrance courtyard.

"If you'd come to court as he wishes, you'd soon be the greatest man in France!" Chrétien said softly.

"Or the greatest rogue. More likely the latter," said Notredame, as they came into the courtyard. "Hello! Wait a bit. I have business here. . . . That's my friend from Salon!"

The Scottish archers of the guard were clustered about two figures, their officer and a huge man, roughly dressed, whose words rolled on the air with a rich Provençal accent.

"But I wrote to him!" he bellowed. "I tell you, I wrote the King a letter, and he is expecting me!"

A guardsman tipped Notredame a wink.

"This fellow," he said, grinning, "has a name exactly like a Provençal oath!"

"The King will know of me," roared the visitor. "Send to him, you fools! Ask about my letter! Find his physician, or Mâitre Notredame, the physician of Salon—"

Notredame pushed forward and spoke loudly.

"Sieur Palamedes Tronc de Condoulet, is it not? Greetings, monsieur!"

Condoulet turned, recognized him, and beamed delightedly.

"Ha! Look there!" He pointed to a horse and cart, detained by the guards, and gesticulated frantically. "I bring the King a cask of our finest vintage, and these popinjay rascals say it might be poisoned!" He went into a storm of fantastic oaths, amid the laughter of the Scots.

Now, the King's physician was an important personage, and anyone just received in private audience was superlatively important; the name of Notredame had been on all lips. Consequently a chamberlain came bustling up, swift at the chance to curry favor.

"What is wrong, messieurs? Can I render you any assistance?"

"If you will have the kindness, yes. Have that cask of wine set down from the cart and opened," said Notredame. "Let us see if it be good wine or not." To the gentleman from Salon he spoke in Provençal, which no one else understood. "Leave this to me, friend."

Now there was brisk movement. The cask was brought from the cart and opened as Condoulet directed. A number of courtiers, attracted to the scene, looked on amusedly. The golden necklace worn by Notredame, which everyone knew for that of the King, aroused swift interest and discussion.

The chamberlain, his eye also on that mark of distinguished favor, approached with a goblet.

"You are serious, monsieur, about tasting the wine?"

"Certainly. I shall do it myself." Notredame took the goblet. Wine was poured into it from the cask. He tasted, drank, and beckoned Guillaume Chrétien. "Here, sample this admirable vintage. Have you any hesitation in recommending it to His Majesty?"

"My faith, no!" said the other, after emptying the cup. "I only wish I could get a cask of it myself!"

"Then,"—Notredame turned to the officious chamberlain—"suppose you present the gift with word that I and Mâitre Chrétien beg to recommend it highly. And you might present the Sieur de Condoulet also. If you can do this, pray consider me deeply in your debt."

The chamberlain was overjoyed. He departed, dragging Condoulet after him, and flinging orders about the wine-cask. Notredame, laughing, passed out of the Hôtel Groslot into the tree-shaded avenue.

His friend plucked at his sleeve.

"Why this fantastic byplay, Michel?"

"Condoulet and I are old friends and neighbors. We're country folk, we Provençals. Peasants at heart, helping a neighbor at need."

Chrétien, who had as yet eaten nothing, took his guest home, insisted upon having a bounteous meal set forth, and together they curiously examined the emerald and chain. It was one the King had always worn, said Chrétien, an odd, lumpish stone, poorly cut.

"You take it and keep it," said Notredame. "I dislike jewels."

The other gaped. "Impossible, man! The King's gift? No, no, it's yours to keep."

"I don't like to own things. I've lost my worldly ties, and desire to own nothing."

"Don't be absurd. This is a famous emerald—the Sphinx, it's called. I don't know why. There was some old scandal about it—connected with the Italian artist Leonardo, if I recall, when I was a boy. Wait till I get an enlarging-glass, and we'll have a look at the stone."

He had barely returned with the lens when Condoulet came bursting in upon them, having tracked Notredame to his lodgings here. He was excited, voluble and gesticulating—the proudest, happiest, most blithesome man in France. He embraced both physicians in a fervor of emotion.

Yes, he had been presented to the King, had kissed his hand—he, Tronc de Condoulet, bourgeois of Salon and merchant in wines—though it was true he had a right to the *de* of nobility, his grandfather having belonged to the petty noblesse—that is to say, his grandfather on the maternal side, who was an Auvergnat. . . .

He talked on interminably. The King had accepted his wine, had thanked him most graciously, had accepted the loan of a few thousand crowns as a token of fealty. Massive, radiant, so overflowing with animal spirits that the room seemed too small to hold him, Condoulet at length ran down, gulped a glass of Chrétien's wine, and vowed he would send the physician a cask of the same vintage he had brought the King.

"Curious, Guillaume," said Notredame, who had been examining the emerald under the glass. "Take a look. There's actually a Sphinx in this gem!"

SO there was, indeed. Enlarged, it was plain to see—the flaws in the stone, by an odd fantasy of Nature, took the exact semblance of the Sphinx sitting in a field of glittering, flashing green. More, there was something keenly fascinating about the enlarged view thus obtained. Chrétien could not take his eyes from it.

"Magnificent, Michel," he said, awed. "There's magic in the appeal it makes to the imagination. One sees things in the stone—"

"Glimpses of the moon," said Notredame with a careless laugh, and turned to the Provençal. "When do you return to Salon?"

"Now! Immediately! That is to say, early in the morning. I'm stopping at the Three Emperors."

"Have you a horse for me? If so, we'll travel together."

Condoulet was overjoyed. He regarded Notredame with the awe and veneration any rustic pays to a great physician; the idea of traveling home together elated him. He agreed at once to stop by here and pick up Notredame in the morning, and with this took his departure. Chrétien, who had been summoned to visit two ladies of the court who had need of his services, reluctantly handed over the chain and enlarging-glass to his friend, and went his ways.

MICHEL DE NOTREDAME took the chain into the garden and began a careful scrutiny of the emerald. The carelessness he had affected was false. In reality, this emerald affected him so acutely that he was startled and disturbed. He disliked and vividly distrusted anything which so aroused his emotions as did this jewel.

But why? That was what he meant to determine—why such an effect? He pored over the emerald for an hour, two hours. Amazement, even a species of fear, grew upon him. The more he looked into this green lump of beryl, the more he saw, or fancied that he saw, in its heart. It aroused speculation, fed the imagination, suggested singular scenes and fantasies—ah, that was it! Suggestion! As a physician far in advance of his day, he knew well the power of suggestion; he used it almost daily himself; he was thoroughly acquainted with its remarkable effects. Here was suggestion—and something else as well, something darker, more sinister. The fascination this emerald exerted was gripping, almost like that of a drug. . . .

"A mental drug, yes," he murmured, resisting the keen temptation to look anew. "Dangerous, these fancies! One feeds the brain upon them as upon mandragora; one comes back for more, ever more; one eventually loses contact with life's realities. . . . Bad, very bad!"

Resolutely, uncompromisingly, he put the thing away and would have no more of it where he himself was concerned. Not that he despised it. He could well conceive cases, mental cases, where it would be of the utmost value to him. The everyday opinion about such a stone, he knew, would simply be that it was bewitched by a devil. He discounted such notions, being aware that the natural world around held marvels greater than any necromance, could one but see them.

But while Notredame was thus playing with the King's gift, a singular scene was taking place in the apartments of Catherine de Medici.

The little princess was listening to the Comte de Vergy relate the happenings of that afternoon. There was no secret about it, of course; he spoke for all to hear, Catherine's attendants hanging on his words, and bursting with laughter to hear him jest about the doctor from the back-country.

"When the rascally doctor is overtaken, make certain that he does not complain to the King. Is my meaning clear?"

For once, however, Catherine did not share their mirth. Instead, she sat like a cat on tension of the prowl—her lips tight, her nostrils quivering, her hands clenched tight and hard. Gone! The great jewel, the marvelous Sphinx emerald, handed over to a country doctor! It was maddening. However, many things had happened to Catherine de Medici that would have maddened other people, and she was still alive and well. She lost her tension, and when able to speak privately to Vergy, nodded calmly to him.

"There is to be dancing this evening, in honor of the King's recovery," she said. "We may talk then with greater freedom."

Cautious Catherine! They talked safely that evening, under cover of the violins and the gay laughing voices. The Comte de Vergy swore he would get the emerald for her. He had found that Notredame was leaving for Provence on the morrow. He could be waylaid easily enough. . . . Catherine stopped him abruptly.

"We must not be rash, my friend," she said coolly. "In all justice, that emerald belongs to me; the King had no right to give it away—but he did so. If anything happened to this miserable fellow here, and the King's gift were missing, there would be a hue

and cry at once. Step softly. I'll send Lorenzo to you tomorrow with horses; you'll find him an excellent lackey. Follow this doctor to a safe distance—you comprehend?"

"Perfectly, madame." Vergy kissed her hand. "We'll manage it safely. Upon my honor, we'll follow him to Provence if need be, and I'll return with your jewel!"

Next morning Catherine instructed the groom Lorenzo, in her careful way:

"Serve M. de Vergy faithfully—but remember you serve me as well. Don't let him overtake this rascally doctor too close to Orléans; and when the fellow is overtaken, make certain that he does not complain to the King. Is my meaning clear?"

Lorenzo showed his white teeth in a merry laugh, and touched his dagger.

"Perfectly, *principessa!* He shall complain to no one—I promise it!"

HAPPILY ignorant of perils, Notredame bade farewell to Mâitre Chrétien and set forth with the Sieur Condoulet for sunny Provence. Before they were over the long stone bridge across the Loire, Notredame caught sight of the barges ascending the river, and had a notable idea.

It was a long and weary road for two men on horseback—Orléans to distant Lyons, and thence down the Rhone a hundred and thirty miles to Avignon—Papal territory, not a part of France; and the rest was but a step to Salon, for which Condoulet was bound, and Aix, the capital of Provence, Notredame's destination. The weariest part of the journey was from here to Lyons—why not, then, ride aboard one of those barges toiling upriver, which could carry them and their horses to boot?

No sooner said than put into effect! And this was why the Comte de Vergy picked up no sign of his quarry until he reached Lyons, and then found himself far behind. With fresh horses, he and his lackey now spurred on desperately. But Notredame and the Sieur Condoulet jogged on together, enjoying one another and the countryside as they journeyed.

They came to Vienne, viewed the Roman remains and went on to Valence, thence on to Montelimart and St. Esprit with its magnificent bridge of twenty-six arches. They could smell Provence in the air now, and pushed ahead eagerly to Orange, with Avignon the next town on the way. Here at Orange, however, Sieur Palamedes Tronc de Condoulet overate of an enormous eel pie, and Notredame had to physick him, which delayed them a day.

They left Orange of an early morning, thinking to make the short distance to Avignon and get in early. Notredame knew the Archbishop who ruled there for the Pope—had, in fact, pulled him through the plague only the year previous—and assured his companion of a right warm welcome. The two were ambling along, a league or less this side of the Papal border, when the Comte de Vergy and his lackey at last caught up with them.

Notredame had noted the dust-spurts behind, and on making out two riders overhauling them, spoke to Condoulet, who laughed and loosened his sword in its sheath—an old and overlong rapier. Sieur Palamedes, who was more pugnacious if less witty than Sir Palamedes of Troy-town fame, looked forward hopefully to attack by brigands. However, the two pursuers overtook them amicably, called on Notredame by name, and the latter amazedly recognized the Comte de Vergy. Not bothering to dismount, the Comte went direct to business, unaware of his lackey's secret instructions, and minded to avoid trouble if possible.

"Monsieur," he said, reining in, "I have followed all the way from Orléans, trying to overtake you. His Majesty sent me after you, monsieur."

Condoulet, finding to his disappointment that it was not an affair of robbers, applied himself with noisy gulps to a large leather bottle of potent wine, which he had obtained at Orange. Notredame, although astonished by the words of Vergy, did not doubt them.

"Indeed? And for what purpose, may I inquire?"

"He has repented of the gift which he made you, monsieur," said Vergy, not caring to waste great politeness on a provincial like this fellow. "He desires you to return it to him, and to permit me, in your courtesy, to make good its value in some other fashion. I trust this will prove to your taste, good monsieur—"

Vergy's approach had been carefully weighed, and ordinarily would have succeeded perfectly; Notredame would have turned over the emerald with the greatest indifference. But the courtier's words were interrupted by Condoulet, who dropped his bottle and broke into furious oaths.

"What's all this? Do I understand you to say that the King, King François, presented M. de Notredame with a jewel and now wants to take it back again?"

"You do," coldly replied the Comte Vergy.

The Provençal exploded wrathfully. "Then, monsieur, I say to your face that you lie!" he thundered. "No one shall so basely insult the King in my presence! The King is my personal friend, and his honor is as my own. Notredame, this is all a scoundrelly plot to rob you of the jewel!"

Vergy was dead white with fury and dismay, for Condoulet was absolutely correct. Meanness or lack of generosity had never been a fault of François of Valois.

At this instant Notredame intervened, intent only upon avoiding any trouble.

"Tronc, for God's sake hold your tongue," he snapped, and turned to Vergy. "I beg you, M. de Vergy, to overlook the hastiness of my friend. The emerald, I assure you, is at His Majesty's service. I shall be glad to confide it to your care."

While speaking, he reined in his horse beside that of Vergy, and took the emerald and chain from his pouch. The Comte de Vergy accepted the jewel with a polite word of thanks—and it was here that his lackey, finding himself close behind Notredame, gave his horse a kick forward and slid out his dagger. He was in the very act of delivering the thrust, when Condoulet intervened.

There was no time to draw weapon, to cry out, to warn Notredame. The Provençal merely jerked his steed around, rose in the stirrups, leaned far over and gave the unfortunate Lorenzo one buffet with all his weight behind it. Not only was the Italian struck senseless—he was literally knocked from his saddle, sent headlong to earth and left hanging, one spur caught in his stirrup. The dagger still glittered in his grip.

The Comte de Vergy exploded in an oath, whipped out his rapier, and struck in his spurs. His startled beast lunged forward and struck against Condoulet's horse. Condoulet, nearly unseated by the shock, was pinked in the arm by the rapier. A maddened bellow escaped him; his long weapon leaped forth; and he sent his horse at Vergy. He had no thought for any niceties of fence. In blind fury he slashed the nobleman across the face, knocked his weapon aside, and ran him through the body. The Comte de Vergy dropped his rapier and fell forward, lolling over the neck of his horse.

IT had happened swiftly, all in an instant. Condoulet was roaring at Vergy to fight on, when Notredame, who never lost his perfect composure, dismounted and went to the side of the courtier.

"Quiet," he said. "I fear you've done for him. Come, lend a hand here."

Condoulet scrambled down. "He's not dead?"

"No, but he soon will be." They stretched the senseless man on the grass. Notredame bared the wound, examined it, and fell to making a bandage and compress. "He may live a few hours if I can stop the blood. What about the other, the lackey?"

Condoulet went to Lorenzo, tried to lift him, and straightened up with an oath.

"Tron de l'air! The fool fell on his head and broke his neck! He was about to stab you in the back when I hit him—here's his stiletto."

Notredame glanced at it and nodded. He finished his work, then picked up the chain and emerald, which had fallen in the grass. With a grimace of distaste, he slipped the chain over the head of Vergy. He turned to find Condoulet standing staring at him and scratching his head, heedless of the blood dripping from his wounded arm.

Notredame made him bare the wound, and bandaged it.

"I owe you thanks for saving my life, neighbor," he said. "But this is a bad affair. This man was the King's favorite. I'd hate to see you broken on the wheel."

Condoulet eyed him in anxious perplexity.

"Maître Notredame, you know everything, so tell me what to do."

NOTREDAME laughed slightly, then sighed.

"We can't let Vergy die here."

"Why not? Dead men are picked up on the roads every day."

"True, but this man is a nobleman of the court." Notredame reflected, plucking at his beard. After all, Condoulet had saved his life. And had the King really sent for the emerald? That story began to look a little extraordinary.

"We're close to Avignon—and once there, we're out of France," he said. "We'll take Vergy along to the city—and you, Sieur Palamedes, keep your mouth shut. Not a word out of you—not a word! Help me tie him in the saddle. My friend the Archbishop can help us here, providing he doesn't learn the truth."

"But the King—the jewel—"

"Devil take them both." Notredame gave him an angry look. "Not a word!"

Making himself dumb, Condoulet fell to work. With Vergy tied in the saddle, they rode on toward the great rock towering against the sky.

Notredame gave his name at the city gates, stating that he must reach the Archbishop immediately. He was promptly passed in, and leaving his companions at the first inn they saw, hastened on to the enormous Place du Palais. At the Archbishop's palace, under the high citadel and palace of the Popes, good luck was with him. He reached the prelate at once, and was greeted with the greatest warmth, but made no delay.

"Monseigneur," he said, "my friend and I picked up and brought in an injured man, who lay by the road outside town. I think he will not live long. I can see to his hurts myself, but you might well send a priest to shrive him. Having met him recently at the King's court, I recognized him: the Comte de Vergy—"

A priest was summoned and Notredame hurried back with him to the inn. Vergy was still alive and weakly conscious. He looked at Notredame and whispered:

"Not the King wanted the jewel—it was the Dauphine, Catherine. That was her man with me. I am sorry—"

Notredame left him with the priest and stood in thought. So it was Catherine de Medici who had tried to get hold of the emerald in this way!

Things were explained now, and the frowning features of Notredame cleared.

"I was right about that emerald," he reflected. "Envy—cupidity—a mad desire for it—ha! Leave it where it is, and good riddance."

He looked up as the priest appeared with a nod.

"Your friend made a good end, monsieur. That is a beautiful chain about his neck."

"It brought him to his death, so leave it where it is," said Notredame. "Come, Condoulet; to the palace, and no talk."

He took his friend back to the Archbishop and presented him. The prelate made them welcome; a secretary jotted down their report of discovering the injured man; and now arose the question of how to dispose of the body.

"My friend, Sieur Condoulet of Salon," Notredame said calmly, "desires to make a charitable offering, for the good of his soul. He wishes that this gentleman be given burial in one of the churches here, with a suitable tomb and a marble angel above it, and will gladly meet the expenses involved."

The astonished Condoulet opened his mouth, but the look he received from Notredame caused him to shut it quickly. The Archbishop was gratified by this laudable purpose of the gentleman from Salon, and nodded amiably.

"The old church of St. Martial, where is buried the Lady Laura, of the poet Petrarch's fancy—the very place!" said he. "The work can be done in two or three days, the gentleman buried, and the marble angel can come in due time."

Condoulet drew Notredame aside and got permission to speak.

"On the fountain in my garden at home," said he, "there is a marble angel. It would be the very thing, and save expense—"

"Silence," said Notredame. "An angel from Salon would not feel comfortable at all, here in Avignon. Be quiet."

The Archbishop, cautioned that Vergy's body might be robbed, undertook to have it entombed intact, and the matter was finished.

LATER in the evening, when they were alone together, Condoulet took issue with his friend. A great shame, he said, to bury that magnificent chain and jewel with the dead man. Let alone its value, the King—

"He did not send Vergy for it." Notredame explained the case. "No, it is an evil thing. I earned it, so I've no desire to return it to the King. It is better off in the tomb, old friend. Between you and me, I'd not be surprised if that emerald were bewitched."

Condoulet hastily crossed himself. He was not in the least superstitious, but no sensible man would have any dealings, any dealings whatever, with any ensorceled thing!

In the days that followed, one matter lingered in Notredame's mind. He often wondered what King François had meant by that singular remark about the emerald having broken the heart of the Italian artist Leonardo, now dead a score of years. Notredame was a curious man, and would have loved to know the story, if there were a story.

Yet he never tried to learn it; he felt a distrust, an actual hatred, for that green stone with a Sphinx in its heart. Better left alone, said he, and acted accordingly.

A wise man, Dr. Notredame—like most country doctors.

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Hank thought about Miss O'Neill, and gave vent to his exuberance with a song he had learned when a paratrooper.

Sneak

HANK RILEY leaned back comfortably against his broad webbed safety belt and hummed a vague off-key tune as he worked. First the sponge, next the squeegee; and finally, as his own personal touch, a soft cloth here and there. Usually the cloth wasn't necessary, but the customers thought it made their windows gleam with a certain super-brilliance.

Down below, automobiles crawled, and people scurried across the streets in disorderly hordes at carefully regulated intervals. Hank surveyed the scene briefly, and grinned a small grin which held a touch of disdain. Down there, life was just ordinary. But at the sixteenth-floor level, life was good. The summer sun shone bright and warm; the breeze brought a faint bouquet of bay and marshland from miles away; and—most important of all—just one floor below were the offices of the Superior Sales Corporation, the place of employment of one Miss Sharon O'Neill.

Hank thought about what he was going to tell Miss O'Neill, and gave vent to his exuberance with a burst of lusty song, the lyrics of which he had learned when he was still wearing the jump-boots of a paratrooper. A prim gray-haired woman at a green-topped desk just inside the window froze Hank with a glacial stare, and he ended the song abruptly. Just as abruptly, the woman's stare changed to a smile. Thus she fell into the usual pattern of reaction to Hank Riley.

People liked Hank. The reflection in the windows he polished showed a shock of red hair, a liberal sprinkling of freckles, innocent blue eyes, and usually an expression of expansive satisfaction with the world at large. His field of attraction extended into the ranks of blondes, brunettes, and redheads of the opposite sex; but his blue eyes turned on the light of love for only one.

He believed, with reasonable accuracy, that Sharon felt the same way about him. But unfortunately, her mother firmly—and often vocally—disapproved of his occupation. Sharon's father had been a bridge-construction foreman until one day fifteen years ago when he missed his footing. Ever since, his widow had counseled her daughter never to marry a man with a hazardous occupation.

"She's right," Sharon often told Hank. "If I married you, I'd be scared silly every time I heard an ambulance siren. You really ought to get into some work that's a little safer, if you want to live to tell your grandchildren about how you won the war."

Hank was whistling when he walked into the office of the Superior Company, and six feminine heads turned in his direction, and six smiles flashed on.

He waved gayly to all of them, and then focused his attention upon one. Sharon's green eyes sparkled, and her flaming hair shone as if it had been burnished. She looked fresh-scrubbed and healthy and beautiful. Hank's heart went through its customary acrobatic routine, but he forced himself to be calm, and motioned for her to lean close to him.

"Honey, I've got news," he whispered, and his smile faded into a look of intent seriousness. "The boss is going to pick one of the men to come into the office and help him, and later sort of take over the management end of things."

"Oh, Hank, could it be—"

"Could it?" he exclaimed aloud, and the smile came back like sunlight through clouds. "It's going to be! I'll see to that!"

"But what about the others?" Sharon was the serious one now, watching him closely, with a shade of doubt in her eyes.

"He has thirty men working for him," Hank said. "Counting my time before the war, I must rank fifth or sixth in seniority. But the others are older, almost ready to quit the business; and the boss will certainly want somebody younger."

"Oh, I hope so, Hank!" Sharon said it fervently, as if she were praying—perhaps for the scent of orange blossoms, and later the patter of little Riley feet.

Hank gave the Superior windows extra-special treatment. Everything had to be extra-special from now on; there couldn't be any slip-ups.

LATER that day he sat in the office of Joe Jeffers, head of Acme Window-cleaning Service. The boss shifted his solid, blocklike weight back in his protesting swivel chair, smoothed a dozen graying hairs across the top of his shiny head, and puffed slowly on his pipe. He considered Hank thoughtfully, and with an expression which might have contained a *soupçon* of misgiving.

"Yes, you've got a chance for the job," Jeffers said slowly, "but so has every other man that's workin' for me. I want somebody that can keep things runnin' smooth-like—a guy that can meet people and drum up new business. I want somebody to take most of the weight off of my shoulders."

He sighed as if envisioning the burden which his words described.

"I can do that," Hank said eagerly. "I get along swell with people."

"Maybe," Jeffers said. "But I want a level-headed fellow." He waved a hairy paw for silence as Hank opened his mouth, and continued: "It was you, wasn't it, that dropped the sponge from the eighth floor of the Trust Building and hit the president of the bank smack on the head?"

Hank flushed. "Yes," he said in a small, meek voice; "but that was an accident."

"I doubt it," Jeffers declared bluntly. "And as I recall, you were the one that scared all the nurses at City Hospital—not to mention the poor sick

Attack

Into each life some rain must fall, the sailor discovered.... But he was of a vengeful temperament.

by RICHARD L. GORDON

people—wearin' that false face while you washed the windows."

Hank squirmed in his chair and studied his fingernails carefully, as if he expected to find something of great importance there. "That was before the war," he said. "I'm older now."

"Well," Jeffers said, leaning forward to knock the ashes from his pipe, "I'm not goin' to make my choice right away. I've got my eye on several of you men. I'm advisin' you to stick to business and cut out the clownin'."

"There'll be nothing but business from now on," Hank said earnestly, raising his right hand slightly as if to give his words the weight of solemn oath. . . .

Hank was on the job next morning by seven o'clock. Again it was a beautiful day. He was working the Jefferson Building, in the heart of the business section, and he had decided to do all the corridor and washroom windows before the offices opened. This would boost his total of windows for the day and, he hoped, elevate him in the estimation of Jeffers.

He yawned as he swabbed and squeegeed the windows on the sixth floor. He had been up till past midnight reading a book entitled: "Persuasive Salesmanship—How to Get Ahead."

"*Getting a job, making a sale, winning the girl—it all adds up to salesmanship.*" That's what the book said.

Hank gestured at his own reflection in a manner he hoped was persuasive. "Now, Mr. Jeffers," he said, "I have a few ideas which I think will improve the business. I have them all listed here, and if you can spare just one minute, I'll be happy to tell you about them."

"*An idea is no good if it can't be sold,*" the book said.

GOING on with his sales-talk, Hank ended: "Thank you very much, Mr. Jeffers, and I assure you that you won't regret choosing me as your assistant."

He glanced down at the awakening city benignly, and smiled as he saw a sailor moving along the sidewalk in a careful zigzag course, as if afraid of submarines.

"Running around all night, spending his money," Hank clucked to himself. The smile faded, and he shook his head. "That's no good. A fellow ought to improve himself and get ahead, and then settle down with a nice girl."

He opened the window, unfastened his safety belt, and climbed in with his paraphernalia. He walked down the corridor, turned right, and went to another window. He washed the inside, and then climbed onto the ledge and began working on the outside. He sloshed the sponge into the bucket on the ledge at his feet and wet the glass thoroughly. Then he began to use the squeegee, and as his reflection appeared in the glass, he started a new sales-talk.

"Now, Mr. Jones," he said, "I know you're busy, and I'm not going to bother you. I merely want to give you five good reasons why you need Acme window-cleaning service."

He gestured at his reflection, and moved his feet apart, taking a firm stance as he gave himself up to the rôle of a salesman. His right foot struck metal, and he dived for the bucket, holding to the safety belt with his left hand and catching the edge of the bucket with his right. But already the water that had been in the bucket was well on its way to earth.

"Look out!" Hank yelled as he saw the sailor, who had come around the corner of the building and zigzagged directly into the path of the falling water. But it was too late. The water scored a direct hit, and the sailor stood soaked and bedraggled in the middle of a widening pool on the sidewalk.

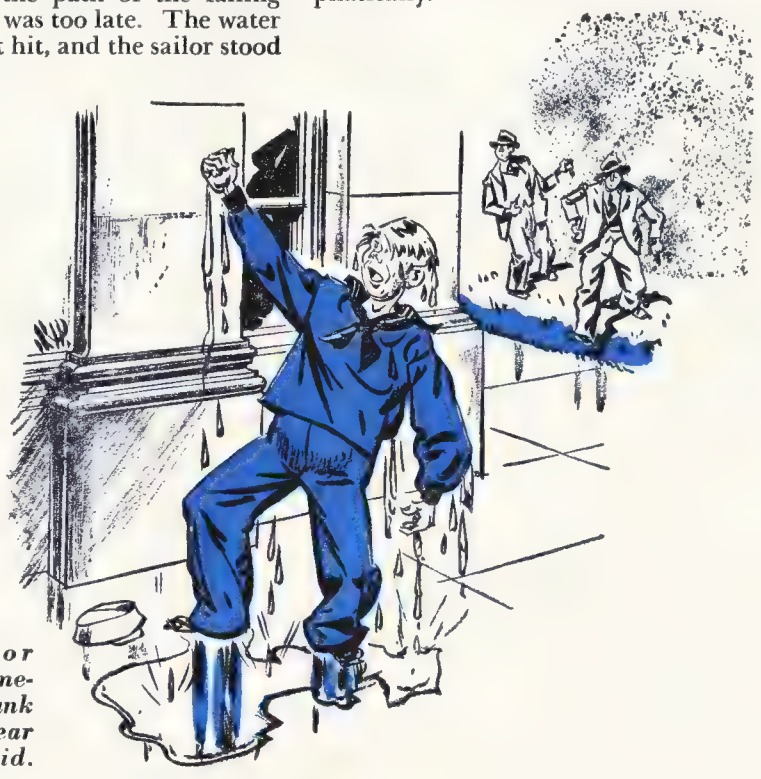
Slowly the sailor put out a hand, palm up, as if testing for rain, and finally he turned a bewildered face upward.

"Sorry, fella," Hank yelled, trying to keep from laughing. "It was an accident."

The sailor stared blankly for a moment, and then his outstretched hand became a fist, which he waved belligerently. He shouted something, but Hank couldn't hear what he said.

Finally the sailor resumed his zigzag course, carrying his soaked cap in his hand. Four or five minutes later, after Hank had refilled his bucket in a washroom and returned to the window, he glanced down to see how the sailor was doing. But the zigzagging pedestrian was nowhere in sight. Hank studied the street carefully, wondering if the sailor might have run afoul of a lamp-post.

Then, as he looked down, he heard a click. Just a little click, but ominous. He turned back to the window; and there, leering through the plate glass, not three feet away, was the sailor. His bleary eyes were bright with glee, and he pointed at the latch on the window and nodded his head emphatically.



The sailor shouted something, but Hank couldn't hear what he said.

Hank reached over and tried the window. It wouldn't move. The sailor shook his head solemnly from side to side.

"Hey!" Hank yelled. "That was an accident. I didn't mean to drop water on you."

The sailor grinned. "This is an accident too," he shouted through the glass. "I didn't mean to lock it."

"Come on," Hank pleaded. "Unfasten the window."

The sailor pursed his lips and shook his head silently.

"Please!" Hank shouted "There's no other way to get down."

The sailor nodded in happy agreement.

"Unlock the window, and I'll buy you a drink!" Hank yelled.

"Thanks," the sailor shouted, "but I jus' had one."

"You open this window!" Hank screamed. "Open it, or I'll call a cop!"

"You'll have to call pretty loud," the sailor said. Then he waved cheerfully and disappeared down the corridor.

Hank looked to right and left. There were no ledges leading to the other windows. He could kick this window in—if he didn't lose his balance in the effort—but plate glass costs money, and what Jeffers would say would not be polite. He was stuck there until people began entering the building; and most of the offices did not open before eight-thirty or nine o'clock. Hank muttered a few vivid, carefully chosen phrases, and then settled back to wait.

LESS than half an hour had passed when he saw a small group of people gathered on the sidewalk across the street. One of them was in the uniform—rather wrinkled—of the U. S. Navy. Another had a newspaper camera, which he seemed to be aiming at Hank. After a few moments the little group moved across the street and entered the Jefferson Building.

Hank watched them, and wondered, and hummed a little, but there was no smile on his face. He peered anxiously through the window, and within a couple of minutes he saw them hurrying toward him down the dimly lighted corridor. The sailor, still grinning broadly but steering a reasonably straight course, was in the lead. He walked to the window, unfastened the latch, and opened up.

Hank was inside in one jump, leaving his safety belt hanging limp on the outside. He brandished his squeegee and demanded:

"What's the big idea, sneaking up here and locking me out?"

And just as he spoke, with the squeegee raised high, there was a blinding flash.

"Hey—" Hank began.

Illustrated by Stuart Hay

A sailor . . . moving along the sidewalk in a careful zigzag course as if afraid of submarines.

"What's your name?" someone asked quickly.

"Hank Riley."

"I'll bet he was in the Air Corps, the way he likes to stay up in the air," the sailor said.

"Yes, I was a paratrooper!" Hank stormed. "Now will somebody tell me—"

"Shake hands," the man with the camera commanded, and the sailor grabbed Hank's right hand, squeegee and all. Again there was a flash.

"What is all this?" Hank demanded hoarsely. "Please—what goes on?"

The sailor hiccuped gently and waved his hand as if to calm Hank.

"The press is int'rested in human int'rest stories," he explained carefully. "So—" He waved his hand again in a grandiose, all-encompassing gesture. "So I told 'em about our little skir—uh, skirmish. Hope y'don't mind."

Hank stood there and stared at his squeegee for a long time after they left. He wondered if the man with the camera really was from a newspaper. Finally he went back to washing windows, but the day didn't seem so beautiful any more.

When Hank checked in at the boss' office at five o'clock, Jeffers motioned him to sit down. The boss was puffing rapidly on his pipe, which emitted clouds of acrid smoke like an overworked tugboat.

"You've seen this?" the boss said with ominous calm, shoving a newspaper across the desk toward Hank.

On the front page, under a two-column caption which said "GOB MAROONS, LIBERATES EX-PARATROOPER," there were three pictures. One, taken from the street, showed Hank outside the window on the sixth floor. (An arrow had been drawn in to point him out to readers with faulty vision.) In the next picture, Hank apparently was about to bash the sailor over the head with a squeegee, and in the third he and the sailor appeared to be shaking hands. The lines under the pictures told the story, from what was called the "aërial attack" upon the sailor to the final liberation and handshaking.

"So there wasn't going to be any more monkey business," the boss said, sarcasm heavy in his voice.

Hank said nothing. There was no use telling Jeffers he hadn't meant to drop the water on the sailor. His dream castles tumbled about his shoulders and disintegrated into dust at his feet.

"Tomorrow," Jeffers said, "you'll work up on North First. There are a lot of small office buildings there, but we don't have any contracts. Get

The triple blow was too much for even the buoyant Riley nature.

to each office and see if they want their windows washed."

He puffed his pipe viciously, and added: "Maybe you'll be able to pick up a few bucks on commission, but I doubt it. Now get out of here!"

Hank didn't go to see Sharon that night, nor did he study his book. Instead, he sat on a park bench and brooded. It was the first time he had ever really brooded, but the triple blow was too much for even the buoyant Riley nature. He had lost his chance to be Jeffers' assistant; he had lost Sharon; and he had lost his standing in the city's window-cleaning fraternity. He, who had always worked the tallest buildings in the business district, had been ordered to beg for small change out in the three- and four-story section!

THE next day the sun played hide-and-seek with the clouds. It probably wouldn't rain, but a person with any sales-resistance at all wouldn't want his windows washed when there was even a chance.

Carrying his window-washing equipment, Hank plodded into the entrance of a shabby four-story office building on North First Avenue and rode a small cage-type elevator to the top floor.

He opened a door that was labeled "*J. H. Browning—Insurance*" and did manage a half-smile for the vacuous-eyed blonde who faced him across a desk.

"Does the building management here furnish window-cleaning service?" he inquired politely.

"I dunno," she said. "I don't think so."

"Do you want your windows washed?" Hank asked.

"Ask Mr. Browning," the blonde said, waving toward the inner office.

Mr. Browning was young and flashily dressed, and a discharge button still gleamed upon his lapel.

"Oh, I don't know about the windows," he said. "They aren't so bad, and it might rain anyhow."

("Don't take no for an answer," the book said.)

Hank shrugged. It really didn't make any difference now, but he might as well try. "It'll only take a few minutes, and it will brighten up—" he began, and then he paused in embarrassment, realizing that Mr. Browning was staring at him as if he were a man from Mars.

"Say," the insurance man inquired, "aren't you the fellow who had his picture in the paper yesterday?"

"Yeah—why?" Hank asked, tightening his grip on the squeegee.

Mr. Browning chuckled, and his face reddened with good humor.

"That was good," he chuckled. "I wish I could have seen that sailor when the water hit him. You should have been a bombardier." Then he added, with a deprecating gesture: "That's what I was."

("Talk about something which you and the prospect have in common.")

They discussed English and French girls for ten minutes, with Mr. Browning doing most of the talking. Finally Hank glanced out the window and remarked casually:

"It looks like it won't rain after all. I can have these windows done in just a few minutes."

"Okay," Mr. Brown said, grinning. "Go to it."

The insurance man watched with obvious admiration as Hank worked, and after the job was done, he said:

"Could you come back regularly and keep these windows clean?"

"Sure," Hank said. "Next time you can finish telling me about the babe you met in the air-raid shelter."

The next office was that of a young attorney, who had a model of an aircraft carrier on his desk.

"I don't know whether it's safe for me to walk in on a Navy man," Hank said, grinning, as the attorney looked up from a law book. "I met up with one yesterday, you know, and came off second best."

BUT the attorney looked blank, so Hank explained: "A sailor locked me out on the sixth floor of the Jefferson Building."

The lawyer grinned broadly. "Oh, you're the window-washer they had in the paper!"

"Yeah," Hank said. "Now if you'll promise not to lock me out, I can have your windows clean in just a few minutes."

After he finished the lawyer's windows, Hank tried those of an advertising agency.

"You're in a good business," he told the middle-aged manager of the agency. "I got some free advertising in the paper yesterday, and now business is booming."

"Are you the fellow that was in the paratroops?" the advertising man asked. "I clipped that story and sent it to my boy. He's a paratrooper too."

When Hank left, the agency's windows were shining, and another name was on the list of steady customers.

AT the end of the day Hank staggered wearily into Jeffers' office, sank into a chair, and tossed a paper onto the desk. There were thirty-two names and addresses on the list.

"What's this?" the boss asked suspiciously.

"People that want Acme service on a steady basis," Hank sighed. "There's a little gold-mine in those small buildings. Very few of 'em furnish window-cleaning service."

"But how'd you line up so many in one day?" the boss demanded.

Hank grinned. "Just by salesmanship," he said, "and a little free advertising yesterday."

There was the faint start of a twinkle in the boss' eyes as he studied Hank. Finally he spoke:

"If you can do this in one day, you must have—" He paused and sighed. "Well," he continued, "I may hate myself later, but—you'll start work here with me in the morning." He puffed his pipe and glared at Hank through the resulting smoke-screen, adding, with a tone of faint hope: "Maybe you'll get married some of these days and really settle down."

Hank's smile spread almost from ear to ear, but suddenly it vanished, and he sat bolt upright.

"Do you have that paper with the pictures in it?" he demanded anxiously.

"It's here somewhere. Why?"

"I've got to find out that sailor's name," Hank said. "He's going to be my best man!"

"So there wasn't going to be any more monkey business," the boss said, sarcasm heavy in his voice.

The Gambling Ship

IN the early Nineties there was a three-masted full-rigged ship named the *Balclutha*. A fine vessel, built for both speed and endurance, she ofttimes had raced down the trade-wind latitudes under her thirty sails; battled her way westward under lower topsails against the hurricane winds of the Horn; driven past Good Hope with the whooping westerly gales at her heel; she'd crept through fog and ice at the Antarctic's edge and in the north Atlantic; ghosted phantom-like in the light airs of the China Sea; lain becalmed in the steamy doldrums of the Pacific, Atlantic, and Indian Oceans; carried cargoes of every sort to a hundred different seaports, and known upon her decks the tread of sailors of from fourteen to sixty of all sizes, shapes, colors, nationalities, and creeds—most being of no admitted creed save that of the old-style sailing-ship sailor, which was expressed in three brief words: *Do your job.*

For some voyages aboard *Balclutha* there was a young fellow of two-and-twenty by the name of Will Clegg; a lad of no note whatever, and with nothing in any way remarkable about his family save that never had any member thereof possessed a bank account or followed any calling other than that of the sea.

Having been at sea since the day preceding his fourteenth birthday, Clegg had served in several ships; then, upon acquiring a second mate's certificate, he shipped in that capacity with *Balclutha*. There was nothing striking about his appearance: he was slightly built, extremely agile, with a smile usually on his rather thin lips. When giving an order his voice was crisp and quick; at other times its intonation was so soft as to seem almost girlish. His light brown eyes were well spaced, and very bright, even when—as was often the case in long periods of storm—he was close to the point of physical exhaustion. His hair, also light brown, was curly. His hands, thin-fingered and slight, belied their womanlike appearance by an extreme tenacity of grip and a steely hardness of knuckles. When ashore between voyages—though since the day preceding his fourteenth birthday he never had been ashore for more than six days at a time—the girls were wild about him.

One bulkhead—ashore, you'd call it a wall—of Clegg's cabin abroad *Balclutha* was covered almost completely by photographs of girls. There were American girls of many types, French, English, Irish, Scandinavian, Italian, and so forth; two dusky Calcutta beauties, and a geisha: girls of all races, sizes, shapes, and colors—but only one creed, because from the minute they set eye on Clegg, their entire thought was centered in three words: *"I want him!"*

Seeing such a collection, one might have presumed that Will Clegg lived for nothing but girls, were it not that the opposite bulkhead was as completely covered by photographs of ships. There were gold clippers built long ago for the rush around Cape Horn to California, clippers built of Java teakwood and sheathed with bright copper for the China tea trade, clippers that sped past Good Hope to Melbourne and Sydney to bring back the Australian wool for London's January wool sales, great Cape Horners of the California and Oregon grain trade; full-rigged ships and barques, some with three, some with four, or even five masts—but not one steamer; Clegg was a sailor of the sail.

The names of the girls on his bulkhead Clegg had forgotten long since, also the colors of their dresses; but the name of every ship on the opposite bulkhead he knew, and the number and cut of her sails; whereby one may know that he was a man's man. . . .

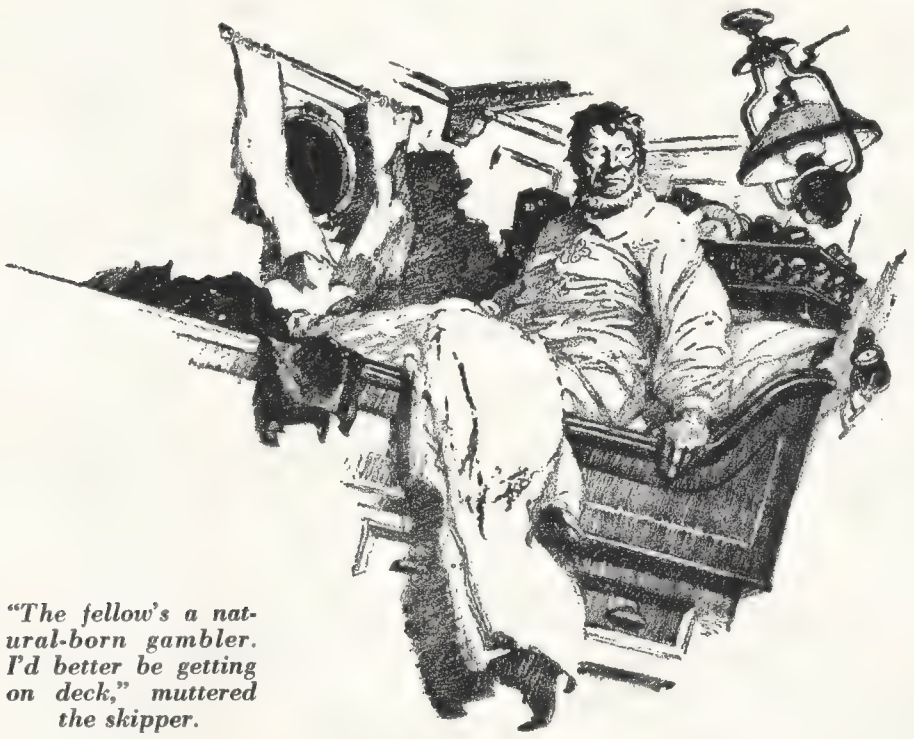
Balclutha was sailing at a fast clip far down in the cold south Atlantic, a strong and steadily rising wind in her six topsails, foresail, and mainsail. Her other twenty-two sails had been furled before dark. The crescent moon was low, would shortly be setting; the sky, heavily beclouded, was growing ever more gloomy.

Suddenly the shrill pipe of a whistle was heard on the poop. The skipper was blowing up the speaking-tube beside his pillow, desiring to speak to his second mate.

"Aye, aye, sir," said Clegg down the tube, a trifle impatiently.

"How's the weather now, Mister?" asked the skipper, for the fourth time since Clegg had taken charge of the ship when the first mate went below at eight bells. It was now close to two bells or nine o'clock. Clegg had been in charge of the ship almost an hour.

"Very fine, sir," replied Clegg calmly, though, as the skipper spoke, a stiff squall struck *Balclutha* so that she



"The fellow's a natural-born gambler. I'd better be getting on deck," muttered the skipper.

"Show us a sailor," the mate would shout. And he got action, for he and the crew knew their business, and the *Balclutha* was a fine full-rigged ship.

by BILL ADAMS

lay far over with her lee bulwark in the sea, every block groaning, every rope close to breaking strain.

"The fellow's a natural-born gambler. I'd better be getting on deck," muttered the skipper, and having tumbled out of his bunk and pulled a pair of trousers over his pajamas, he hurried up to the poop. At the instant of his arrival the moon went behind a cloud and a squall fiercer than its predecessor struck the speeding ship so that she raced along in inky darkness with the leeward half of her long deck under water and sprays smashing upon her deckhouses and her lower sails in solid sheets.

"GET the mainsail off her at once!" bellowed the skipper.

"Did you say something, sir?" shouted Clegg. Standing two feet downwind from the skipper, he had heard the order clearly, but he hated to take any more sail off the driving ship.

"Get that mainsail off her before she goes over!" bellowed the skipper, a hand on Clegg's arm, his lips at Clegg's ear.

"What's the Old Man getting so excited about? She hasn't capsized yet! Why all the fuss?" muttered Clegg to himself; then he shouted into the skipper's ear, "Did you say take the mainsail off her, sir?"

"D'ye want to lose the ship? Call all hands on deck! Look alive and get that mainsail off her!" roared the skipper, expecting at any moment to hear the masts crash and go overboard, or the ship to capsize.

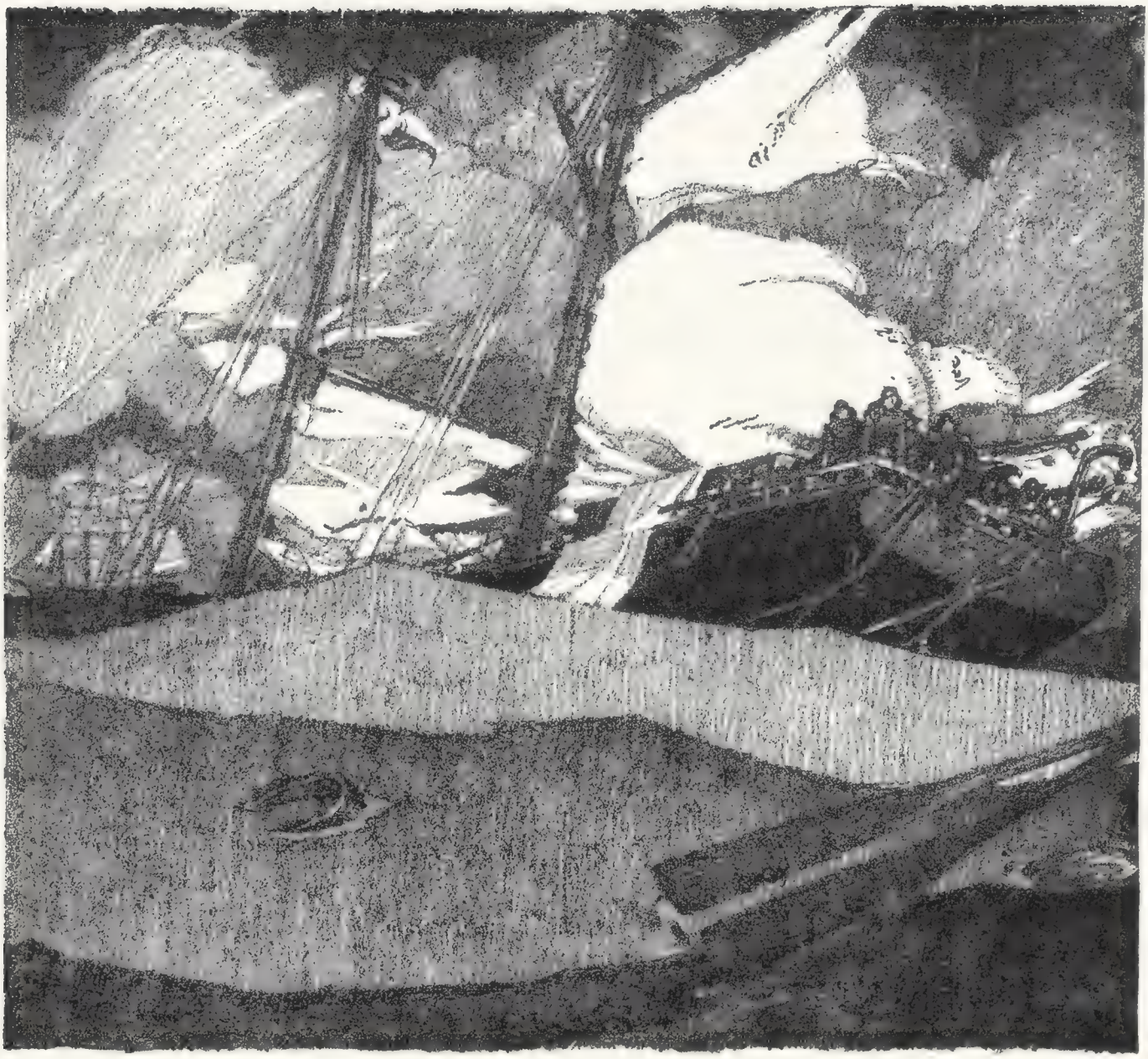
"Aye, aye, sir!" shouted Clegg, grinning in the darkness—and blowing his whistle for his men, he leaped down to the water-swept main deck, hearing as he went the skipper repeat the order to call out the mate and his watch.

"To blazes with the mate and his watch!" said Clegg to himself, and to his own watch he shouted, "Hop along, lads! Show us a sailor!" Within four minutes the mainsail, a hundred feet across the head by some forty-five deep, was hauled up ready for furling, its white folds flapping ghostly in the gloom sixty feet above the rolling sea-swept deck.

"Hop aloft and make that sail fast, sons!" shouted Clegg, and leaped into the rigging to lead the way.

"She's got a dandy fine crew," said the skipper to himself, taking it for

A scream rang out from the mainyard as a sailor hurtled downward.



granted that the mate and his watch were out lending a hand. Next moment the crescent moon broke clear from scudding clouds low over the horizon; by its faint light he saw the figures of Clegg and his six able seamen walking out along the swaying footrope to gather in the wildly flapping sail. "The second mate didn't hear my order to call all hands. Well, he's a pretty good young sailor, I guess," he muttered.

A scream rang out from the mainyard as, knocked backward from the footrope by the thrashing canvas, a sailor hurtled downward to the sea. The skipper saw the splash as the man struck the wild water, and heard a yell by another of the crew, *"Man overboard!"*

"Poor fellow!" thought the skipper, as the watch, obeying the second's order, hurried down to the deck. "I can't stop the ship in this wind and sea—be too risky. Even if I did, we'd never be able to get a boat away."

And then the skipper saw that Clegg was diving from the mainyard. Between the scream of the falling man and the time that Clegg had kicked off his heavy sea boots, thrown off his long oilskin coat, and leaped after him, was but a matter of seconds.

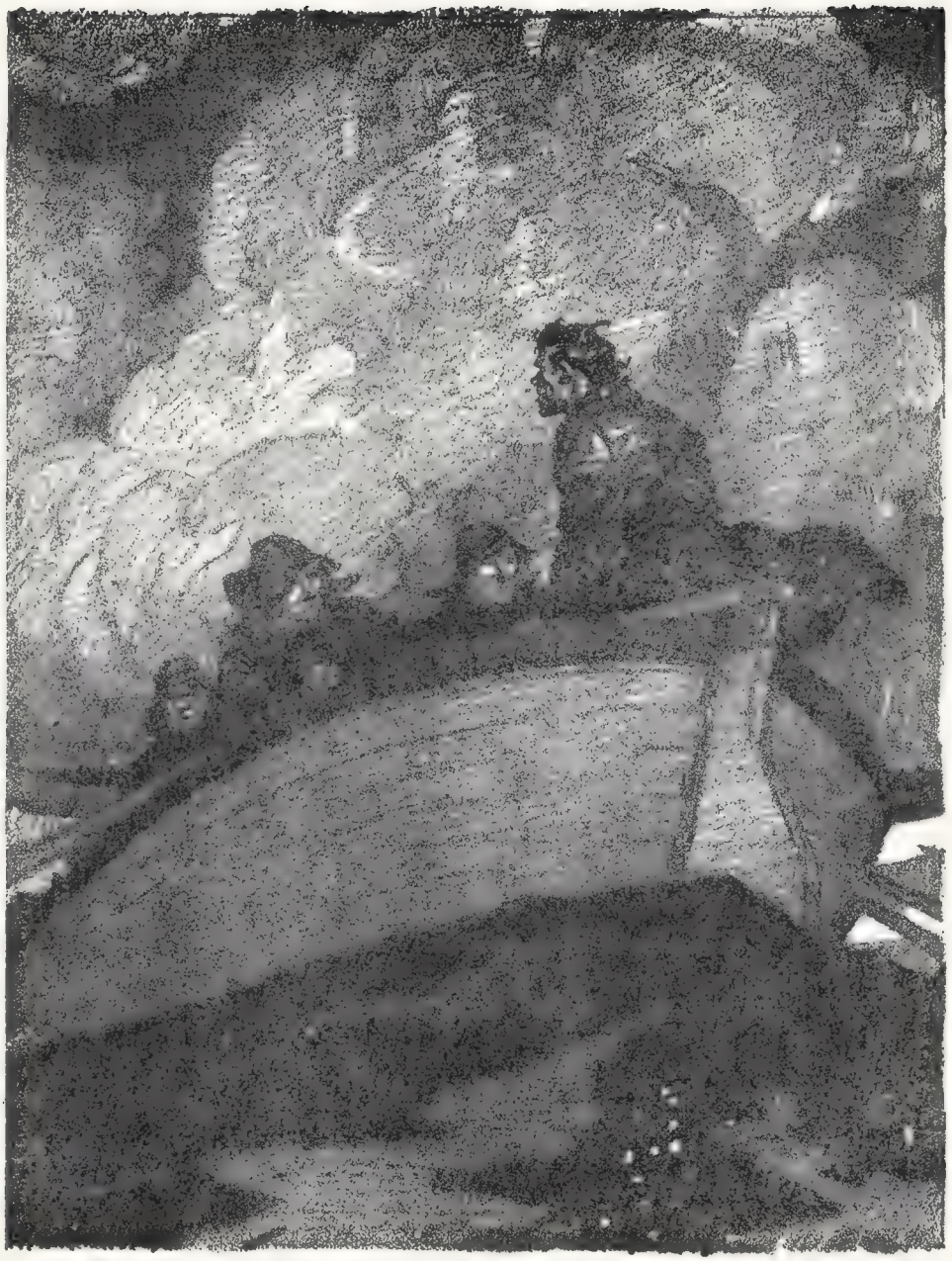
"I'll get him, sir!" came Clegg's clear voice from the water, as the moon went out and the night fell pitch-dark.

"All hands on deck!" roared the skipper. To have faced the fury of the Horn gales with one good man missing would have been bad enough; to do so without the second mate also would be too dire. By the grace of some amazing luck it *might* be possible to bring the ship to, and get a boat away.

As happens at times when the moon is setting, the wind fell suddenly to a fresh breeze only; an ominous lull came on the sullen sea. Perhaps twelve minutes passed between the time the sailor fell and the time that a boat, with the mate, and four strong rowers at her oars, left the ship's side. How far in that time had *Balclutha* sailed? Perhaps two miles. In what direction from the ship were the lost men, if yet alive? The moon was gone, the night inky. A sailor on the quarterdeck said gloomily, "It's goin' to blow again, an' harder; the boat'll never git back."

HEARING the words, the skipper, alone in the blackness of the poop above, thought, "That gambling lad has made a bitter mess of things!"

Though not a prayerful man, the mate, steering the lifeboat, prayed he



"Lay back on those oars now! Let her have it!" ordered Clegg, when the boat was safely clear of the ship.

was steering the right course while the oarsmen drove her through invisible white-crested seas and ink-black hollows. No star was anywhere in the sky. Darkness was absolute. There was no sound save the roar of rising wind, and the sea's cold slap; no light save far away, and growing ever farther, the wanly glimmering lantern in *Balclutha's* rigging, to guide them back.

On and seemingly forever on, the mate, erect in the tossed boat's stern, shouted the lost men's names. No answer came, save the steady roar of wind and sea's cold slap. A long-drawn hour passed by, and half of another ere, with *Balclutha's* light now a tiny winking speck, he said, "No use, lads; they're gone . . . . You can take it a bit easier now, lads," said the mate, turning the boat toward the light of the ship.

And then, from somewhere in the hidden sea close by, there came a clear crisp voice: "Lend me a hand to get him aboard, Mister Mate. He's about done in."

So they hauled in the able seaman, and laid him down in the boat. But young Will Clegg, having heaved himself in over the gunwale unaided, took a long ash oar and pushed it out through its rowlock. "Give way, lads! Let's get back to the ship!" said he, setting the rowers' pace. . . .

"You took a mighty great gamble, Mister," said the skipper to Clegg when the boat was back in her davits and *Balclutha* again on her way; then he called all hands to the chartroom and to each gave a tot of rum.

"'Ere's to the second mate, boys!" called a sailor, lifting his pannikin high. Skipper and mate drank that toast, as well as the men.

And the saved man called out: "Gawd bless ye, sir! I've a wife an' kids back 'ome as'll bless ye too."

And young Will Clegg said quietly, having downed his rum, "Why, that's all right; a fellow does his job!" And he went down to his cabin, and standing naked he looked at his ship pictures and laughed as he rubbed his cold hide dry with a towel.

THERE was another time, upon another voyage. Will Clegg, in charge of the deck, gazed with an expressionless face at the wild weather ahead. It was the third day of a North Atlantic gale, and winter. Close over the swaying mastheads drove a low scud of sullen black clouds, as though it ever had so driven, and so would drive until the end of time. At frequent intervals heavy rain, mingled with hail, blew slantwise on the howling wind. When, laboring in a ceaseless monotony of ravenous seas, the ship dipped into terrific troughs, tons of green water roared over her bulwarks and falling with a thunderous uproar upon her decks, temporarily submerged hatches, fiferails, and deckhouses.

It was close to four bells, ten o'clock of the forenoon watch. Clegg had been in charge of the deck since eight. Having been caught by a boarding sea when on his way from his cabin to the poop, he was soaked to the hide. The tobacco and matches in a pocket of his long oilskin coat were also soaked.

Four bells struck. An elderly able seaman came up to relieve the wheel. As he passed Clegg, their eyes met. The sailor, who had contrived to make his way along the perilous deck without being swept from his feet, scowled as though the second mate were responsible for the foul weather.

"Cheer up, son!" shouted Clegg—to the seaman old enough to have been his sire; whereat the fellow came to a stop, regarding him from amazed eyes.

"All in the day's work! Got any 'baccy?" shouted Clegg.

The sailor brought from some pocket beneath his oilskins a small package of shag tobacco and a box of matches.

"Thanks! When the chance comes I'll do you a good turn too," shouted Clegg, and while the sailor went on to the wheel he stepped to the lee of the charthouse to fill and light his pipe.

"Wot d'ye think o' the secon' mate?" asked the old sailor of the man he was relieving at the wheel.

"'E don't give a damn fer nothin', Jenkins!" came the reply.

" 'E better be givin' a damn! This ain't no bloomin' picnic!" retorted Jenkins, taking the wheel over.

Having repeated the ship's course to Clegg, the relieved helmsman stood at the head of the poop ladder, watching his chance to dash forward without being caught by a boarding sea. On the point of leaping down to the main deck, he was stopped by Clegg's hand on his shoulder.

"Look away a point on the port bow! What d'ye see?" shouted Clegg.

"Nothin' but a lot o' water, sir," came the reply.

"Get forward and tell the watch to keep handy!" ordered Clegg, and as the man raced forward, Clegg looked into the charthouse within which sat the skipper staring dismally at the barometer on the bulkhead.

"Schooner in distress on the port bow, sir," reported Clegg.

"I DON'T see anything, Mister," said the skipper, after gazing for some moments in the direction whither Clegg pointed.

"A two-mast schooner with her topmasts and all her sail gone, sir," said Clegg, and fetched the telescope from the chartroom.

"I still don't see anything," said the skipper, when he had searched the sea on the port bow.

"Maybe you'd see her from the rigging, sir," said Clegg.

"You'd better call all hands on deck, though I'm afraid we can't offer her any assistance in this wind and sea," the skipper called down, having climbed into the rigging to search the sea on the port bow.

The first mate joined the skipper and Clegg, and with the telescope to his eye, watched the distressed schooner become nearer as the ship advanced.

"She's an American, sir. I can see her flag flying upside down in her main rigging," said he.

"She can't last much longer; her decks are almost awash. Not a thing we can do in this wind and sea, Mister," said the skipper.

"No sir. Even if we could get a boat away, there'd be small chance she'd live in this sea," said the mate.

"What are those fellows looking at?" asked the skipper, his gaze on some of the crew who had climbed into the fore rigging and were pointing to the sea astern.

"Curses!" exclaimed Clegg, looking whither the men were looking. "It's one of the big North German Lloyd liners, coming up astern."

"Why 'curses'?" the mate asked. "She'll be able to take off the schooner's crew."

"That's why I said 'curses'," said Clegg to himself; to the mate he said aloud: "Maybe she will, and maybe she won't—here's hoping!"

Illustrated by Raymond Sisley

"The *Hohenzollern,* one of their biggest boats," the skipper announced, when in a few minutes the great liner was speeding past *Balclutha.* The schooner was now in plain sight, a mile or so distant.

"See what she's signaling, Mister," said the skipper to Clegg as a string of flags ran aloft on the *Hohenzollern.*

Having run into the chartroom and studied the International Code Book for a moment, Clegg returned with a grin on his lips. "She's signaling, 'Regret am unable to offer you any assistance,' " he reported.

"No one can blame her, in this wind and sea," said the skipper.

"Lord love a duck, sir!" said Clegg. "She could steam a little to windward of the wreck, dump oil enough to make a good slick on the sea, put a boat off, and steam down to leeward and pick it up. It'd be no trick at all, if she had any *sailors* board."

"The Germans never were a seafaring race, Mister," said the skipper.

"If you was to ask me, Cap'n, I'd say they was a seafarin' *dis*grace," old Jenkins remarked.

Hail lashed down, crashing upon masts, spars, deckhouses and rails, and hiding everything at a little distance from the laboring ship. When it cleared off a few minutes later, the *Hohenzollern* was far ahead; only her upper works, and funnels with a black smoke-cloud blowing from them, was still visible. A quarter of a mile to leeward of *Balclutha* lay the schooner, her decks awash, rags of sail streaming from her splintered spars and the Stars and Stripes upside down as a distress signal in her main rigging.

"Thank you, Mister! Thank you indeed! How shall I ever be able to repay you?" said the schooner's skipper.

"God pity them!" exclaimed the skipper, his eyes on six men clinging to the rigging beneath the appealing flag.

"I've heard God helps those who help themselves, sir; I want your permission to ask for volunteers to man a boat and go get them," said Clegg.

The skipper stared blankly at his young second mate.

"If men are willing, you can't refuse, sir. That's the code of the sea," said Clegg.

"Very well, Mister; but you'll do well to reconsider it," replied the skipper.

At the shrill of Clegg's whistle the crew raced aft to the quarterdeck, battling their way through water waist-deep on the decks.

"I want four volunteers to come with me and take those chaps off the schooner," said Clegg, looking down to their upturned faces. Of thirteen men on the quarterdeck, thirteen stepped forward.

"What's the man at the wheel shouting about?" the skipper asked the mate.

"He's the oldest man in the crew, sir. Probably thinks as you and I do, that the second's going to drown four good men—and do no good to anyone," replied the mate.

"*You, you* and *you—*" said Clegg, picking three able seamen in turn when the boat was swung out ready for lowering. To a fourth he said, "Go take the wheel, son; I'm taking old Jenkins to pull stroke oar."

"Lower away easy! Watch your chance! *Now!*" ordered Clegg to the the men on deck, when the boat's crew were in their places.

"Steady! *Hold all!*" shouted the skipper, as the ship dipped deep in a terrific trough. He was too late. Lifted by an onsweeping grayback, the boat was hurled bodily against the ship's side, her planks stove in, and smashed.

"All right, sons! Luck's with us!" shouted Clegg, when he and his oarsmen had swarmed up the davit tackles and, by the skin of their teeth, were safely back on deck.

"Aye, you're mighty lucky, Mister Clegg! It was suicide you were trying," the skipper commented.

"All right, sons! Clear away the other boat!" Clegg shouted.

"Good heavens—wait! Hold on, young fellow. You'd better think it over!" bellowed the skipper.

"Hooray for a bloomin' picnic, b'ys!" old Jenkins yelled.

"Lay back on those oars now! Let her have it!" ordered Clegg, when the boat was safely clear of the ship.

"He'll never make it," groaned the skipper, as a harder squall than any yet lashed down, with huge hailstones rattling and bouncing from masts, spars and deckhouses, hiding the sea a few feet from the ship's sides.

"There they are, pulling round her stern to get down to leeward of her so those six poor fellows can jump," cried the mate as the squall cleared for a moment.

"He's got them all; but he'll never make it back," cried the skipper, perceiving an even fiercer squall driving down from windward.

Hail lashed down again, its furious uproar nigh superseding that of wind and sea, making men bow their heads, hide their bare hands, cower.

The squall cleared; the desolate sea between ship and schooner was empty.

"They're surely gone!" wailed the skipper.

"Hooray! Hooray!" roared the able seamen clinging to the mizzen rigging, as the boat rose from a deep sea trough to a high foam-crested summit. A few moments more, and the six half-frozen men from the schooner were being hauled swiftly aboard.

"Stand by to hoist the boat quickly, men. The minute the davit tackles are fast, run her right up!" ordered the skipper, and shouted to Clegg and his oarsmen: "Get aboard quick, lads! Up you come, now!"

"All right, sons! Back to the wreck now!" cried Clegg to his boat's crew, as he fended the boat away from the ship's rolling side.

"Mr. Clegg! Hold on there! For God's sake, hold on!" shouted the amazed skipper, as the boat pulled away again.

THE skipper of the schooner spoke, water dripping from him, the American flag in his hand:

"Your second mate said he was going back to fetch off my sextant and the ship's cat. I couldn't dissuade him," said he.

Eight bells struck—twelve o'clock—as the boat came once more back to the ship and alongside her. Erect in her stern stood Clegg, one hand on her tiller, the other stroking the head of a frightened tabby cat that peered from beneath his long oilskin coat. Swiftly the ship's crew, helped by the men of the schooner, each of whom

had had a tot of hot rum, hoisted the boat to her davits.

"Here you are, Captain," said Clegg, and handed a sextant to the lost vessel's skipper.

"Thank you, Mister. Thank you, indeed! When we get home my wife will be writing to thank you too for saving her cat, which I persuaded her to let me take to sea to bring us good luck. You've saved my crew and me, and saved us our flag too, as well as my wife's cat and my sextant. How shall I ever be able to repay you?" said the schooner's skipper.

And young Will Clegg said quietly, having downed his rum, "Why, that's all right. A fellow does his job." And he went below to his cabin, and standing naked he looked at his ship pictures and laughed as he rubbed his cold hide dry with a towel.

WHAT Clegg said later, when he received from William McKinley, President of the United States, a big gold medal "In recognition of gallantry at sea," no one ever knew. But the last time we met he showed me the medal.

"You should have seen my girl's eyes when she saw it! It was the first time ever she'd heard about that schooner. As soon as I've my master's ticket, she's going to marry me," said he.

But Clegg never married that girl, or any other. It was an old saying amongst us sailors of the old days of sail that, "The sea always takes the best." He was one of the very best.

And what of *Balclutha?*

Long afterward, when—thanks to the ditch at Panama—steamers had taken the sea from us sailormen, the *Balclutha* was sold and her name changed. Her new owners, the Alaska packers, named her *Star of Holland.* For a few years she sailed between San Francisco and the salmon canneries up North: then she was sold again when steam took that trade too. *Pacific Queen,* her new owner named her. I saw her a few years ago, disconsolate by a San Francisco wharf; a sign at the head of her gangway stated that admission for the public was twenty-five cents.

Now, sold once again, *Balclutha* is to be a "gambling ship" over at Sausalito on the other side of San Francisco Bay. Men in soft shirts and fine shoes, with rings on their fingers, and money in their pockets—women in low-necked dresses, with painted fingernails and carmined lips, perfumed and powdered, will tread where long ago young Will Clegg trod, and will gamble for dollars. No one will know that a ghost passes among them—a ghost with a smile on his lips, who when living, playing a man's game, was king among gamblers. Only *Balclutha* will know.

The Burma Mission

THE room was full of chattering diplomats and military figures. It was Washington of 1943—a typical smart cocktail party attended by Captain and Mrs. Sherman B. Joost.

"Pete" Joost sat talking politely to a Government official. His mind was not on the conversation but on his own problem: For months now he had been detailed to this cocktail-party routine, carrying out his assignment as an officer attached to the foreign liaison division of the War Department. He knew the work was important—probably the softest job in the service; but what he wanted was action—action overseas.

He spotted an old friend of his wife's, and over a drink discussed his plight. The man promised to see what he could do. That promise was the introduction to some of the most exciting war years experienced by any living American. For a few weeks later the thirty-one-year-old Princeton graduate was ordered to report to the mysterious Office of Strategic Services for a secret mission in Afghanistan.

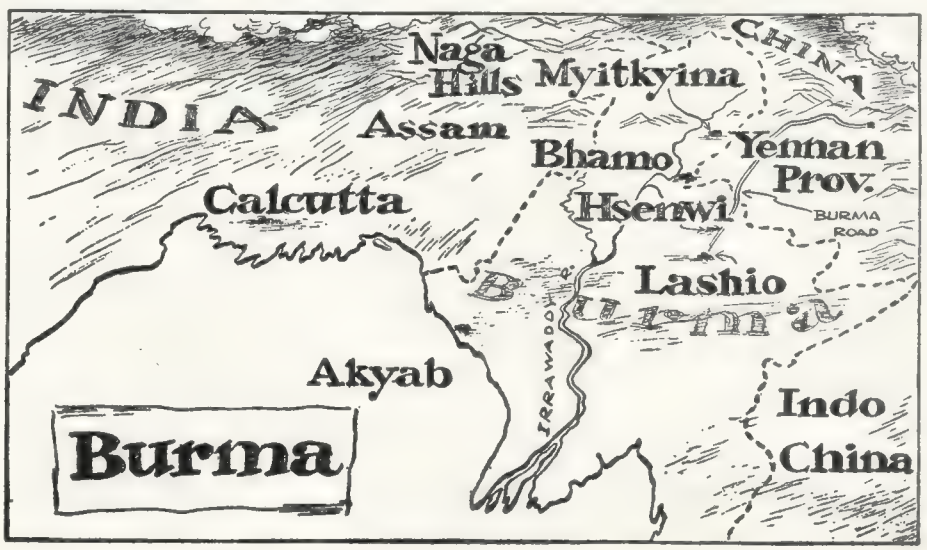
"You will report," said his OSS commander, "to a Colonel Eifler at 101 Detachment in northern Assam."

"Yes sir," answered the amazed Joost, "but where is northern Assam?"

It was April of 1943 when young Captain Joost headed west from Washington on a tedious sixty-five day trip to Karachi, India. On arrival he discovered to his chagrin that none of the port authorities had ever heard of Colonel Eifler, of OSS, or even of northern Assam. They suggested that he try going to Delhi.

It took Joost all of three weeks to locate and reach the base among the tea plantations of northern Assam. Two months after leaving Washington, he pulled up at an overseer's cottage—headquarters of the Office of Strategic Services, CBI. Here he found a tiny detachment of six American officers and ten enlisted men with a group of natives—the nucleus of what was to develop into one of the most famous units in the secret files of OSS.

Here too he met the amazing Colonel Eifler—one of the truly unbelievable individuals of the many spectacular characters who served in the wartime secret service of the United States. In short order, Eifler banished all prospects of Joost's mission to Afghanistan. As commander of the



The colorful story of OSS Major Sherman Joost, who organized a unit of wild Kachins and fought a very successful war in the jungle.

by

LT. COMDR. RICHARD M. KELLY

Illustrated by John McDermott

fledgling OSS establishment in the China-Burma-India Theater, the redoubtable Colonel needed every man he could wangle from whatever source. With hardly time to get his bearings, Captain Joost was plunged into the busy routine of 101 Detachment. His first assignment involved the training of Anglo-Burmese OSS agents whom Eifler had recruited for intelligence work behind the Japanese lines in Burma.

These alert operatives were taught the rudiments of operational intelligence, radio communications, weapons and demolitions. Then they would be infiltrated either by parachute or overland to begin their highly important missions. American personnel to accompany these natives were also given similar training, with heavy emphasis on survival in the jungle. Though Joost did not realize it at the time, some of the lessons learned during this period, were later to play an important part in saving his life.

The military situation in Burma and the nature of the country made vital the part that these OSS agents were beginning to play in the Allied strategy. When Joost arrived at 101, the Japs were not only supreme in Burma but were massing heavy forces for an invasion of India. In 1942 General Stilwell and the British had been chased across Burma and given what "Vinegar Joe" aptly termed "a hell of a beating." With only a handful of American troops, Stilwell in the following months had trained two Chinese divisions with which he now hoped to drive the Japs out of northern Burma and reopen the overland life-line to China.

To the south, the British 14th Army under General Slim was holding the Japs on the threshold of India at Akyab. Stilwell's ambitious plans required dependable information on the jungle-hidden Japanese. The nature of the terrain was such that air observation was completely inadequate for this vital purpose. Also Stilwell with his untested Chinese

"Up to number six everything went like clockwork. Then number seven cracked up after hitting a small hummock."

"A minute and a half later, Railton again came tearing through the

forces was facing some of Tojo's finest troops; and at that time the Japanese were reputed to be unbeatable as jungle fighters. Success of the Allied plan required harassment of the Japanese behind their own lines. This guerrilla warfare and the securing of intelligence were the two assignments given to Detachment 101. Their fulfillment was to make history—a history in which Pete Joost was to play a leading part. . . .

After a month of working with the Anglo-Burmese, Pete Joost was transferred to the dangerous and trying detail of dispatching air drops to the agents, both native and American, already in the field. These tricky flights, on which many C-47's were lost, kept Joost busy until the end of 1943.

FOLLOWING the Quebec Conference, at which Lord Louis Mountbatten was made chief of the Southeast Asia Command (splitting the theater between him and Stilwell), and major plans were decided for an Allied offensive, General Donovan arrived to inspect 101 Detachment. It was on this trip that General Donovan made his spectacular and daring trip with Eifler in the latter's tiny plane to visit the OSS men behind the Japanese lines. The Chief's dramatic appearance in the secret jungle camp gave the men of 101 a tremendous boost.

For Captain Joost, General Donovan's arrival meant something very special—an exciting new assignment to join the fabulous Army Air Force Colonel Philip "Flip" Cochran, Commanding Officer of the newly formed First Air Commando Force. This was a crack glider unit destined to spearhead a top-secret aërial invasion of north central Burma. Like most Americans, Joost had heard of Cochran, more for his prominence in Milton Caniff's cartoon strip "Terry and the Pirates" than for his very great achievements with the Air Force in North Africa. Cochran had charge of the air side of Major General Ord Wingate's invasion—the greatest Allied glider operation of the war up to that time.

Starting in January, 1944, Captain Joost worked feverishly with Colonel Cochran, perfecting details for the great air operation. The gliders, fighters, bombers and transports participating in the operation were all supplied by the American Air Force. The two divisions of troops were all British, and included big black West Africans, wiry little Gurkhas, tall powerful Sikhs, rugged Kachins, and British Tommies.

All these troops had to be trained for glider operations, and the ranking officers had to be convinced of the feasibility of glider tactics. Joost and Cochran participated in many demonstrations, including a spectacular night rehearsal in which fifteen fully loaded gliders made a night landing in a typical Indian rice paddy. Lord Louis Mountbatten and his staff witnessed this demonstration, which was carried off perfectly, although the glider pilots had never seen the paddy before. The fifteen big gliders, each with twelve fully armed soldiers, landed silently and without a hitch. Then as a clincher, Cochran had several loaded gliders whisked aloft by the C-47's. The tow-ropes of these gliders were hung between two poles which carried marking lights. Then while the big brass gazed in amazed disbelief, the C-47's, each trailing a big hook on a reel, came over at a throttled-down speed of ninety miles an hour, and jerked the gliders aloft. Mountbatten's comment was typical: "The most impressive sight I have ever seen." The big glider landing was given the final green light.

The historic take-off from Hailakandi in India on March 8, 1944, was a moment of high drama, as recalled by Captain Joost: "The plan was to land two divisions, one at each of the two selected paddies which were called Broadway and Piccadilly. Commanding the two divisions was Major General Ord Wingate,* youthful, bearded Britisher who had led a British column overland through the Burmese jungles some months before. Lord Louis, Col. Cochran, Wingate and many other officers were waiting for the take-off, which was scheduled for six P.M. The fully loaded gliders were strung out down the field for a mile and a half. Each C-47 was to pull two gliders.

"The planes were warming up," Joost relates, "when a last-minute reconnaissance plane flew in with new photographs of the two landing-grounds. Fifteen minutes before the first plane was scheduled to take off, the pictures were rushed to the commanding officers, with whom I was

*Killed in an airplane crash March 24, 1944. Only now as we go to press (April, 1947), the newspapers report the discovery of his body.

enclosure and dashed by us, clearing the corpses with a mighty leap."

standing. The pictures showed huge teak logs strewn all over the Piccadilly paddy. It didn't seem possible that it could be just a coincidence. Had the Japs got wind of our top-secret invasion plans? As I looked at the pictures I knew it would have been suicide to attempt to glide-land a division of troops on that paddy. Fortunately, Broadway was still free of obstacles. We all looked at Wingate. Would he call off the whole operation, which had been approved by the Combined Chiefs of Staff, and into which had gone months of planning and tremendous preparations? Wingate just stood there calmly combing his flowing beard, studying the pictures and listening to the comments of Cochran and the other experts. Then he made his decision. 'We'll land both divisions at Broadway.'

"As soon as the order was given, I raced to my glider, which was number one on the third plane. I was carrying a ninety-pound pack filled with jungle kit, K rations, extra clothes and extra ammo. In addition I carried a fully loaded tommy-gun, a carbine, a .45, and a sack of grenades. None of us had any idea how long we would be in the jungle or what we would come up against, so we went prepared for a long stay and lots of action. I wedged myself into the last seat in the glider, and strapped myself in. We were so closely packed, and loaded with so much gear that movement was impossible. Save for the American pilot and co-pilot, I was the only other white man aboard. My companions were all West African blacks and Kachins. There was absolutely no conversation aboard the plane. We took off easily enough, and soon were riding in perfect quiet about seventy-five yards behind our plane. I could see our other glider riding nicely slightly higher and a little to our rear.

"It was about six-fifteen when we left Hailakandi, and we were due to cut loose at eight-thirty. The moon was fairly bright, and I could see two planes ahead of us quite clearly. Suddenly the column leader flashed a signal. We had arrived at Broadway. Below me I could see the paddy. I knew it was a hundred yards wide and about six hundred long—small enough, but from the air it looked positively tiny. Our C-47 started down and then zoomed up as the pilot evidently changed his mind. We circled once, and then as we turned back toward the paddy, I watched our glider pilot release the tow-rope, and without a sound we headed toward the ground.

"The landing was fine, and the second we came to a stop, I was out of the glider. The field was deathly still; not a sound could be heard anywhere. It was an eerie sensation. Everyone jumped out quickly and pushed our glider over to the side of the field to make way for those to follow. The timing called for a landing every two minutes. We had barely cleared our glider when *swish,* in came another, and then another and another. Ours had been the third to land; and up to number six, everything went like clockwork. Then number seven cracked up after hitting a small hummock in the middle of the field. The impact split the glider, and the soldiers were spilled out onto the field. Before we could get enough men together to move the wrecked glider, another six or seven came crashing into it and made a bad mess.

"Save for this unfortunate accident, which cost us about ninety killed and the same number injured, the landing went off perfectly. That first night 125 gliders landed approximately fifteen hundred troops. In spite of the casualties, both Cochran and Wingate were reported to be very pleased. They figured that they would have lost a great many more to the Japs and sickness in the jungle had they attempted to move in overland.

"Immediately after the landing, the British officers in charge set up a perimeter defense. We were a hundred miles behind the Jap lines, and the nearest Japs were figured to be just fifteen miles away. We later learned that they were completely unaware of the fact that a large enemy force had dropped in on them. I stayed awake that first night, but save for those on guard, most of the troops slept.

"The next day things really began to happen at our aërial beachhead. C-47's came in with engineers, bulldozers and all sorts of equipment to build an airfield and a base. With them also came thousands of more troops to form the several offensive columns which were to take off through the jungle to strike at the Japs. With the daylight air activity, all secrecy of the operation was naturally blown, and the Jap bombers soon came over to blast the field. The British flew in heavy antiaircraft de-

fenses, and though the Japs were very persistent in their bombing countermeasures, their damage was limited. We could not understand why we didn't draw an immediate attack from Japanese troops, and it wasn't until sometime later that we learned the reason. At the very same time that the Wingate thrust was being launched at the Jap rear, the Japanese had opened an all-out offensive at Akyab to break through into India. Five days after the landing, however, a force of five hundred Japs moved into position about eight miles from our new base. Brigadier Calvert, a dashing commander who had been middleweight boxing champion of the British Army, took out a force of three hundred Gurkhas to intercept them. After a stealthy night approach, they crashed into the Jap camp at dawn and practically exterminated them.

"ONE of the most startling things in the build-up of the two divisions and all their supplies was the large number of cattle flown in for the native troops. I'll never forget the surprise of the American Air Force crew-men when these cows were put aboard their planes. Each animal had a smiling black man stationed at its rear to intercept with his bare hands any unscheduled droppings. I don't think these Air Corps boys ever got over that one. . . .

"My assignment, once the landing was completed and the field secured, was to join up with a British column, called Dah Force. This group of seventy-five men was under the command of a British Lt. Colonel, and was made up of twenty-five British Tommies and fifty Kachins. There was also an Anglo-Burmese officer, two other British officers and myself, a lone American. Our mission was to strike out two hundred odd miles across Burma for the Chinese border, where we were to join up with some reported Chinese guerrillas. In addition to this we were to attack Japanese traffic on the Bhamo-Myitkyina road, and recruit Kachin tribesmen, once we reached their territory on our way to China.

"On the sixth day after landing, our little group set out early in the morning. Before leaving, I left most of my extra gear at the airfield; and it wasn't long before I began to discard most everything but my jungle essentials, weapons and ammo.

"The six-weeks march that followed was a nightmare. I was in no shape for any extensive hiking, certainly not for tramping through the jungle and trying to keep up with the untiring Kachins. We had barely moved out when we discovered that we were being chased by the Japs, and from the second day they were constantly after us. Our rear guards, among whom I unfortunately almost always found myself, had numerous skirmishes with these Japs, whom they reported to be about two hundred in number. We were constantly forced to detour to avoid Jap concentrations, as we didn't want battle, and were in no shape for it.

"Our usual procedure on approaching a village was to fan out and then burst in on the natives. First we would grab the head man and try to find out the situation about the Japs. Then we would dig up some food, take a few hostages to guard against treachery, and push on. Nights were usually spent in villages after we had elaborately booby-trapped the trails in every direction.

"For the most part the jungle was quiet, save for colonies of howling monkeys. We didn't see many wild animals save for an occasional wild elephant; but we saw plenty evidence of tigers, who frequently attacked our pack-animals at night. In the morning we would find the half-eaten mule, usually dragged several hundred yards from our camp. Unfortunately, we never got a shot at these tigers.

"One of the strangest parts of this terrible march was the amazing performance our very British colonel would put on in every little village. Immediately after our arrival he would have the chief call all the natives together for a speech. Then after the Union Jack was run up on the main pole, he would through an interpreter deliver an impassioned speech about how the British were back, they had nothing to worry about, everything was all right and Burma was rapidly being liberated. Almost without fail in the middle of this rousing speech of assurance a little native would rush up with news that the Jap forces were pushing up the trail, hot on our tails. Immediately, the speech would be broken off, the Union Jack would be hoisted down, and our whole column would go tearing out the other end of the village. I never could figure out the sense of this peculiar performance, and I can't imagine what the Burmese thought of it.

"Col. Jhao. He was an amazing character."

"Crossing the Bhamo-Myitkyina road, we had to dodge between Japanese trucks. Our men were keen to attack a few of them, but the Colonel decided against it. We lost three of our mules in this crossing. They broke away from their guides and ran off with most of our radio equipment and some other important luggage. Once across this road we were in Kachin country, and we managed to recruit an additional fifty men.

"Here I was initiated into some of the Kachin fighting tactics, and I quickly came to understand why both the British and the Japs had never been able to exert any real control over these fiercely independent hill people. Favorite defensive and jungle ambush weapon of the Kachins was the use of *pungyis*. These were eight- or nine-inch bamboo stakes, sharpened to pin-points and hardened in fire. Originally developed as a primitive method of catching wild pigs and other animals, they were adapted to jungle warfare with results as effective as they were not pretty to behold.

"The Kachins would plant these *pungyis* by the thousands for ten yards on either side of the trails leading to their villages, and along a stretch of about a hundred and fifty yards. They would be firmly set about four inches apart at an angle pointed toward the trail. Being bamboo, they matched the foliage perfectly and were almost impossible to see. After preparing a trap, the Kachins would set up a roadblock and lie in wait for a Jap column. Lying quietly until the leading Japs were just a few feet from them, they would open fire. The surviving Japs would throw themselves to the side of the trail to avoid the fire, and become hopelessly impaled on the hundreds of razor-sharp wooden spikes. Once so caught, it was almost impossible to extricate oneself, as every movement would only bring new and bloody

wounds. Following the ambush, the Kachins would either finish off their victims with gunfire, or just leave them to die.

"About the middle of May, when we were still a day's march from the old abandoned British fort at Nahpaw, on the Chinese border, which was our destination, we were heavily attacked by a strong force of Japs at nine in the evening. We decided to push ahead, and marched all that night, arriving at the fort at six next morning.

"Tired from our forced march on the end of an exhausting six-weeks chase, we were all delighted to reach our major objective where we hoped to meet up with the Chinese guerrillas, who we understood were in league with Chiang Kai-shek's famed secret service chief, Ti Li. The fort was situated on the top of a big hill that looked over into the Chinese province of Yennan. It was an ancient brick and wood structure and hadn't been occupied for many years. A fifteen-foot stockade with two massive doors at each end of the enclosure surrounded the main building, and a number of small cubicles which were ranged around it. These looked like separate quarters for the men. The area inside the stockade was about seventy-five by fifty yards. Two small villages, one Kachin and one Chinese, were at the foot of the hill. It was a very poor defensive position, for heavy undergrowth came up the hill almost to the edge of the stockade, which in itself didn't look very substantial. The hilltop was completely exposed, and would have been a perfect set-up for mortaring.

"SHORTLY after our arrival we met the Chinese guerrilla leader, and after a conference in which we outlined our plans, he agreed to help us. This development made us all feel good, and we unpacked for a long-needed rest. Unfortunately it was very short-lived. The Colonel went down to the villages to check on the local situation, and most of the rest of us prepared to turn in after posting guards. Along about ten-thirty our attention was directed to a trail which led down the opposite mountain from China. Long columns of men were headed in our direction! The natives informed us that these were Japanese troops, though they were dressed in Chinese clothes. By one-thirty we had counted twelve hundred of them, and began to get really worried. They were still three or four miles away, but evidently coming toward us.

"We sent a worried message to the Colonel in the village, but he sent back word not to worry and to hang on, as he was bringing up reinforcements. This didn't make much sense to the rest of us, but we immediately

"Miraculously it proved to be a big firecracker, not a grenade."

set up gun positions both inside and outside the stockade and grimly awaited developments. Along toward dusk our Colonel returned bringing with him three very young Kachin boys. These were the 'reinforcements' he had promised! We were all mad as hell, and his weak promise that more would be up later hardly reassured us. More did come up later, but they weren't reinforcements.

"After the Colonel arrived, I left the main building of the fort to take care of a British captain who was suffering from a very severe case of malaria. I helped him into one of the smaller cubicles, and was just making him as comfortable as possible when an uproar of rifle and machine-gun shots broke out. I shook my companion, who woke up, and together we peeked outside. It was not quite dark, and we couldn't see a thing, though there were bullets kicking up all around us. We had just stepped outside and were standing in the shadows of our cubicle when one of the stockade doors, about fifteen yards to our left, burst open, and a crowd of armed men started to rush inside the stockade. Mike and I opened up on them with our tommy-guns and piled them up in the half-opened gateway. For fifteen seconds there was dead silence, and then we cautiously went over to the gate to look at the corpses. We turned them over, and they looked like Chinese to us, but we hadn't seen many Japs and it was hard to tell.

"While we were still standing in the shadow of the stockade, the gate at the other side of the stockade broke open and a lone figure came racing through, followed at a distance of about ten yards by a shouting crowd of thirty or forty men. The lone figure headed straight for our gate; and as he sped by, we recognized him as Captain Railton, the other junior British officer with Dah Force. The crowd chasing him were definitely Japs. There wasn't any doubt about that. Mike and I were too astounded to make a move. We just stood there and looked at each other in disbelief. Then it dawned on me that they had not shot him because they wanted to take him alive.

"A minute and a half later, Railton again came tearing through the far gate, raced through the enclosure and dashed by us out our gate, clearing the corpses with a mighty leap. The same crowd of Japs were still hot on his trail, and we were glad to note his lead was still about ten yards. Railton had run around the outside of the stockade and cut through it a second time. The runners passed within five yards of us each time, but so intent were they all on the chase that no one noticed us standing quietly in the shadows. I was too surprised to say anything, but Mike turned to me and said: 'Bet he does it again.'

"Sure enough, a few seconds later Railton repeated his amazing performance and still keeping his distance, disappeared out the gate a third time. Mike and I gave the pursuing Japs a burst with our tommy-guns, then rushed across the enclosure and out the far gate before the Japs could return our fire. Outside, it was pitch black, and the racket from small arms was terrific. Not knowing what else to do, we started down the trail toward the villages. We had only covered about forty yards when a bullet kicked up the dirt at Mike's feet, and then another landed just ahead of me. I recognized the distinctive report of an American carbine and called out. It was our Colonel sitting there all alone on the trail, popping at anything he heard coming down.

"HE seemed glad to see us. He said: 'Think we ought to retreat, don't you?' We both thought it was a damn' good idea, considering everything. The Colonel then blew a whistle, and after a few minutes about twenty-five survivors grouped themselves around us and we started down the trail. Just before starting out, I happened to look up and on a rise above us saw a lone figure light some-

thing and throw it down. It landed about ten feet from me and exploded. Miraculously it proved to be a big firecracker and not a grenade, which would have wiped us out. I found out later that both the Japs and Chinese frequently used firecrackers in battle!

"On our way down to the villages we were twice ambushed, once by the Chinese guerrillas, and the second time by some Kachins. This second ambush was a mess, as several of our men were caught on *pungyis* and badly wounded. By the time we arrived in the comparative safety of the village, all but the three British officers and myself were wounded.

"The Colonel sent me to a jungle hide-out with the wounded, all of whom suffered severely from both hunger and their festering wounds until we finally received an emergency air drop a week later. Captain Railton turned up three days after the Japanese capture of the fort with an amazing story. As he rounded the stockade the third time after passing us, he was tripped and fell off a small embankment. Evidently our fire had momentarily distracted the pursuing Japs, who didn't seem to have seen him fall. As he hit the ground, a hand was flung over his mouth and another hand pulled him close to the ground. Then a voice whispered into his ear in English: 'Keep quiet, Sahib.' All that night the two of them lay there, while the Japanese celebrated their victory in the fort, drinking British rum. Just before dawn they had managed to slip away, and only then did he discover that his rescuer who had tripped him up and then held him still was an exmember of the Indian Colonial army who had been a refugee from the Japs. Learning that there were some British troops in the area he had been attempting to get near to the fort to join us, and while lying there had watched Railton being chased by the Japs.

"AS soon as the twenty-odd survivors were able to move, the Colonel decided to proceed to Myitkyina, which was now under assault by General Stilwell's forces. I had had enough of Dah Force, and after a conference with the new Chinese guerrilla leader, decided to cast my lot with him for a while. I say new leader, because his predecessor had been killed in the fighting at the fort. He had been among the first group that had burst inside the stockade that Mike and I had unfortunately mowed down. Far from being upset at the fate of his predecessor, Col. Jhao, as he was called, seemed quite pleased at his promotion, and he was delighted to have me come along. Two wonderful Kachins came along with me. One of them, my bodyguard, was invaluable. Unlike most of the Kachins, who were small and wiry, this fellow was six feet and quite heavy. He was most devoted to me, and I was mighty glad to have him around.

"My principal difficulty in the month I spent with these guerrillas was my inability to speak the language or to know what was going on most of the time. This was quite dangerous, for we were in action almost continuously, either fighting off the Japs who came after us almost every day, or in frequent night attacks on Japanese columns and garrisons. I solved this problem at first by sticking very close to Col. Jhao. He was an amazing character. He always rode a big white mule, which was fitted out with a gaudy cushion. Another colorful touch was a pork-pie felt hat which he always wore campus fashion with turned-up brim. Whenever he moved, I figured there was good reason for me to move too, and it was usually right.

"Finally I got around the language difficulty. The colonel's secretary, a Mr. Hsee, who was a very well-educated Chinese, kept trying to communicate with me. Finally he tried something which seemed like Portuguese, a language I had learned in Brazil. It turned out to be Latin, which I had taken at Princeton and had always considered a complete waste of time. Mr. Hsee had learned Latin at a French monastery in China, and under the pressure of necessity we both managed to recall enough to get along quite well together.

"Because of the constant Japanese pressure against this band, which numbered about eight hundred, and not wanting to be caught by the Japs, my Kachins built us a secret hide-out which we could use as a place of refuge in the event of a successful mop-up. They cut a path through an impenetrable bamboo thicket and built a small shack beside a jungle stream. Then they replaced the bamboo stalks in such a way that it was impossible to tell that anyone had cut a trail through. We stocked this hide-out with some vital supplies, and it gave us a real feeling of assurance; but fortunately we were never forced to retreat to it.

"During my stay here in the Simapa Valley, a shot-down British pilot was brought in by the Chinese. He had escape panels with him, and we laid them out in a rice paddy where the rescue planes spotted them. Just as a plane started to land, it came under very heavy ground fire from Jap troops in the next paddy. This was our first indication that enemy troops had entered our area. The rescue plane managed to get away, and the pilot and I headed back up the trail to rejoin the guerrillas. Suddenly just around a bend ahead of us we heard a great commotion in the usually quiet jungle, and barely had time to jump off the path into some bushes when a Jap column started passing less than five yards from us.

"THEY were the biggest and best-equipped Japs I had ever seen. It was an artillery regiment, complete with all their guns and supplies. It took over two hours to pass our hide-out, and several times they called a halt right in front of us, giving me a pretty bad time. The worst moment came when a whole company of them were stopped just a few feet from us. I was staring at them, not daring to move a muscle, when I chanced to glance at my British friend. To my horror, he seemed completely unconcerned, and drew a cigarette out of his tunic pocket. I thought he was going to light it, but was afraid to whisper a word of caution. To my relief he just put it in his mouth and made no move to light up. Finally the last of them disappeared down the trail toward the front, and we were able to relax.

"My experience with the guerrillas convinced me that they were really interested in killing Japs, and the very determined efforts the enemy were making to wipe out the band proved to me it was accomplishing real results. The Colonel was anxious for increased supplies, and I volunteered to go to General Stilwell and see if I could secure some additional support. The nearest Allied troops were the forces besieging Myitkyina, about seventy-five miles to the southwest. It took me eight days to reach the Myitkyina air-strip. The trip took me through the Japanese lines, but the most dangerous phases were in crossing the line of the attacking Chinese. From the air-strip I was flown by light plane back to the General's headquarters.

"After four months in the jungle, during which I had lost thirty-five pounds and all my clothes save for a tattered pair of shorts and had grown a bushy beard, I did not present a very trim appearance to meet the theater commander. But the General didn't go in for formalities, and when he heard where I had come from, he saw me immediately. He was interested in the work of the guerrillas, but said he could not supply them as he was having enough trouble with the two Chinese divisions he now had. Then he asked me if I knew Colonel Peers of OSS. When I said that I knew him very well, he told me the Colonel would be there that night, and he wanted me to see him about organizing some Kachins to work behind the Jap lines in the Bhamo area.

"This idea appealed to me very much, as I had seen enough of the Kachins in action to know that there

were no better jungle fighters. Colonel Peers was surprised to see me and quite concerned about my condition. I was suffering from worms, dysentery and malaria, and he insisted that before taking up my new assignment for General Stilwell, I return to Calcutta for treatment in the base hospital. Peers, one of the finest officers I ever met in the service, had succeeded to the command of 101 Detachment, which had by now been built up to a very sizable organization and was playing a very important part in the whole Burma campaign. . . .

"After a wonderful week in the hospital, where I at least got rid of my worms, I headed back for a final briefing from General Stilwell. He told me that I could recruit up to ten thousand Kachins, and he would guarantee every type of support in the line of the needed arms and supplies. My directives were to secure intelligence, harass the Japs and spearhead the advance of Stilwell's troops. My territory was all of North Burma to the east of the Irrawaddy River and up to the Chinese border. This vast zone was called Area One.

"Our assignment with regard to Myitkyina was more specific: In addition to supplying intelligence and conducting raids behind the Jap lines, we were asked to set up road-blocks to cut off all retreat to the east and south of the besieged city, and if possible to intercept any straggling Japs who might be coming down from the north.

"Stilwell's two Chinese divisions and a small British column called Morris Force were slowly closing in on the two thousand-odd Japs who were under siege in the city. The strategic airfield about four miles outside the town had been captured by the Kachin-guided Merrill's Marauders at the end of May. After that initial success, the Japs had begun an amazing defense against the vastly superior Allied forces.

"Peers and I flew by light plane from the Myitkyina air-strip to my new headquarters at Kwitu, eight miles northeast of Myitkyina. Here I met Lt. Danny Mudrinich, Lt. Jake Esterline and three hundred youthful Kachins, who had moved down from another OSS area about sixty miles to the north under Navy Commander Dr. Jim Luce.

"We immediately set up road-blocks as directed, and soon began to have very gratifying results. The Kachins prepared their ambushes with *pungyis* along both sides of the trails and carefully set up hidden machine-guns. The Japs would blunder along, usually at night and in small detachments. In almost every case they would be wiped out to a man. We never counted a Jap as dead unless the Kachins brought in his right ear, and it was

"The Kachins retaliated by dropping mortar shells ahead of the rafts."

"An artillery regiment—it took two hours to pass our hide-out. The

a rare patrol which didn't bring in its share of bloody tallies carefully wrapped in bamboo leaves.

"OUR intelligence operation also worked very well. We managed to smuggle a number of operatives in and out of the besieged city. Invariably on returning they brought back valuable targets for our bombers. We also managed to contact a number of Indians, Burmese and Shans who worked for various Jap garrisons, divisional headquarters and civil administrators. These sources would report to us by courier, and were responsible for a great deal of valuable data on enemy troop movements and unit identifications.

"We maintained daily liaison with the British Morris Force, which had come up from the south as part of Wingate's very successful glider invasion. Wingate himself had been tragically killed in a plane crash shortly after I had left with Dah Force. After four months in the jungle, fighting most of the time, Morris Force was a badly beaten-up unit. At one time during the Myitkyina fight, they were down from their original one thousand, to fifty effectives. Their sad state was brought home very vividly to us by a young British Lieutenant Grimwood, who used to walk the six miles to our camp to obtain daily intelligence summaries. It was only after a week, that we discovered Grimwood had a bullet and an open wound in his hip. He had had absolutely no medical care, and yet every day he had hiked twelve miles with never a murmur. We managed to get him flown out to General Seagrave's famous field hospital, and later he returned to join our unit.

"Good as was the hunting along the trails, our greatest success came from picking off Japs who attempted to escape south by riding improvised rafts down the swift and swollen Irrawaddy. When we realized what was happening, we set up 'duck blinds' about a mile apart along a nine-mile stretch of the river north of Myitkyina. The Japs would come floating along, eight or ten to a raft, and our men would have a field-day hitting them with machine and Bren guns. This worked very well for a while. Then the Japs caught on, and they began to build their rafts high up in the water. At the first burst they would topple off, giving us the impression we'd picked them off. But a few seconds later they would come up under the raft. The Kachins retaliated by dropping mortar shells just ahead of the rafts, and the concussion of the underwater explosion was more than effective. Though we couldn't get the ears to prove it, I am sure that we killed more than three hundred escaping Japs on the river in addition to a similar number confirmed from our ambushes.

"About two weeks before the town was due to fall, we informed headquarters that we were moving our three companies south about eighty miles to Sima, where we hoped to catch any retreating Japs who had managed to flee the captured town. Our particular goal was the fantastic Jap colonel who was responsible for the terrific Nip resistance. Later we discovered that he had accomplished the seemingly impossible defense by keeping his men hopped up with opium. Temporarily effective, it was an expedient that left them in awful shape, as we were to discover a week after we arrived at Sima, and the first of the approximately five hundred Jap survivors came through.

"In the next few weeks we bagged over four hundred more Japs, all without casualties to our own forces. We didn't lose a man in the fighting around Myitkyina, either. The Japs would come down along the Namtu River bank in groups of five or six. Our patrols would wait in well-hidden positions until about fifty Nips were assembled and starting to build their rafts. Then the Kachins would open up and massacre them. Any that survived a first ambushing would usually be caught later on. Most of the Japs were in such terrible shape that they put up very little fight.

"JUST before leaving Kwitu, Lt. Joe Lazarsky, a wonderful young first lieutenant from Hazelton, Penna., had joined us and been put in command of our first company. I was with Joe and his Kachins when we finally caught up with the famous Jap colonel and the last batch from the Myitkyina garrison. The natives had been giving us dozens of tips on a large force of Japs heading south, but all of them

worst moment came when they were stopped just a few feet from us."

so far had turned out to be false. Finally we confirmed the intelligence that a force of a hundred was moving quite slowly toward Sima. Unfortunately, we had been badly hit by malaria and had only fifty Kachins for the ambush. With these men we fixed up a nice trap and waited. When the Japs came along, we let them get very close. Then we opened up with automatic weapons. We killed about twenty-five and took one prisoner. The rest fanned out, and we watched them reassemble in a small village.

"The prisoner told us that he had been carrying the litter of the wounded colonel. Heartened by this piece of good news, we surrounded the tiny village with our few men and set up some two-inch mortars at a range of seventy-five yards. All but a few of the Japs had gone into the various *bashas,* with about half of them in the main *basha.* Joe dropped his first shells right onto this big *basha.* They went right through the roof and exploded inside, setting the place on fire. A few Nips came out and were immediately picked off by the Kachins. Then Joe turned his mortars on the other huts with similar results. Only twenty of the enemy survived this attack, and they were hit twice again farther down the trail. Later we learned that no more than fifty of the five hundred Japs who had escaped from Myitkyina ever reached Bhamo.

"During this mop-up period at Sima we had a pretty bad time due to sickness and a severe shortage of supplies. Malaria hit almost everyone, and a long stretch of bad weather—it was the height of the monsoon period—made it impossible for the planes to get through for a drop. As this was our only source of supply, we really began to feel the pinch. At one time out of the three hundred Kachins and twelve Americans, we had only fifteen well men. In spite of this we kept all our road-blocks manned, and maintained our twenty-four-hour schedule of intelligence patrols.

"Best thing to happen at Sima was the arrival of Kachin Captain Lazum Tang, a very able and experienced soldier whom I had met in Dah Force. With him he brought two Subadars, a Burma Rifle rank similar to sergeant-major. Both these latter were named Labang La, though they were not related. These men gave a tremendous impetus to our recruiting. This was now the main consideration, as there were about seven thousand Japs in Bhamo, and without vastly increased forces there wasn't very much we could accomplish.

"Along about this time a delegation of Kachins visited us from Sinlumkabar, capital of the Kachin hills, twelve miles from Bhamo. These Kachins told us that there were several thousand Kachins, all veterans of the Burma Rifles, waiting in the area to revolt against the Japs. All they needed were the weapons. These men had been instructed by the British to return to their villages during the disastrous retreat across Burma in 1942. The colonial-minded British, however, had collected all but their most ancient weapons. Up to this time, the bulk of our Kachins had been youngsters ranging from thirteen to twenty, with a few up to fifty. I realized that the Kachins in the Bhamo area were much more advanced than those we had recruited farther north. With their splendid training in the Burma Rifles, they would make excellent soldiers. The delegation assured us that in the past two years the Kachins had hidden their rice and precious salt from the Japs. They had also picked up a few Japanese weapons and gained some more from Wingate's first and second expeditions, which had sent columns through their territory.

"Accordingly I sent Lazarsky and Lazum with a few men and a radio down to a village eight miles from Sinlumkabar. It happened to be Lazum's native village. Meanwhile I made the long hike up to Myitkyina to see General Stilwell and try to straighten out our supply situation, which was the key to our expansion now that we had lined up the Kachins.

"General Stilwell was glad to see me and very congratulatory about the success of our work at Myitkyina and Sima. He promised me all the supplies I needed, and told me that he wanted us to do the same kind of a job at Bhamo, which was the next objective of his Chinese divisions. I told him that if we received the necessary supplies, we would capture and hold Sinlumkabar and then commence harassing operations against the Japs in

the Bhamo area. After that we would cut south toward Lashio and cut off escape routes for the Bhamo garrison. Stilwell's force was to drive south to take the city and push on to Lashio, Burma road terminus, and major objective of the North Burma campaign. Headquarters of 101 doubted that we could either take or hold Sinlumkabar, but I was very anxious to capture it, not only for its strategic advantage but also for its great prestige value as the Washington of the Kachin hills.

"After a short stay at Stilwell's headquarters, I parachuted back behind the Jap lines with a Burmese radioman. We landed on October fourth at a village just outside Sinlumkabar. I was forced to parachute, my first jump, because one of my legs had begun to atrophy. It was giving me a lot of trouble.

"ON landing, I immediately conferred with Lazum, Lazarsky and several Kachin chiefs. I was delighted to learn that they had lined up one thousand Kachins who were all set to go as soon as they received the arms. Luckily we had a break in the weather, and in response to our radioed request, fifteen planeloads dropped to us the very next day.

"Right after receiving and distributing these arms to the fantastically happy Kachins, who gave every evidence of knowing how to use them, we had another lucky break: A very coöperative Jap lieutenant and two soldiers came up to our village searching for a work elephant which had broken away. The Kachins had killed one of the Japs, but made prisoners of the officer and the remaining soldier. With a little persuasion, this officer gave us much very valuable information on the identity of all the Jap units in that part of Burma. We also learned that the Jap strength in Bhamo was actually seven thousand, and from both him and the Kachins we discovered that a force of about four hundred Japs came up from Bhamo to Sinlumkabar every few days, stayed in the Kachin capital for three or four days and then left again.

"On the seventh we heard that four hundred Japs had just left Sinlumkabar for Bhamo. By now we had one thousand eager Kachins under arms. Wasting no time, we quickly moved into the city before the Jap relief force could take over. As there wasn't a single Jap in the town, our triumphal entry was unopposed, but the thousand or so natives greeted us vociferously. Immediately we set up defensive positions and stationed guards. For our headquarters we took over the building of the British commissioner, a very fine modern structure, with comforts which were really appreciated by all of us after so many weeks in the disease-ridden jungles.

"That first night Lazum, Lazarsky and I had quite a celebration of our bloodless but very significant victory. After a number of toasts drunk with *laku*, the native liquor, we turned in dead tired and quite happy. . . .

"The next day was perfect for flying, and true to his promise, Stilwell sent over twenty planeloads. The chutes came down on the football field, and with the supplies we were able to arm another one thousand men. Sinlumkabar was situated on the top of a big hill. Off to one side, you could look over into China, and on the other you could look down on Bhamo, only twelve miles away. This great air drop was the first indication that the Japs in Bhamo had of our capture of the city. We expected an immediate reaction, and were not disappointed.

"That very night a battalion of Japs headed off the main trail from Bhamo. We had anticipated such a move and had set a beautiful trap for them. Our mortars were zeroed in on the trail, and our Bren and machine-guns were set up for a perfect cross-fire. In addition the Kachins, of course, had both sides of the path covered with the deadly *pungyis*.

"THERE were about four hundred Japs in the column. The Kachins waited until they were well into the ambush, then as we gave the word, everything let loose. Over a hundred were killed and the same number wounded. The survivors fled back to Bhamo. We didn't lose a man. The next night another Jap column tried to move into the town from the northwest, with about the same results.

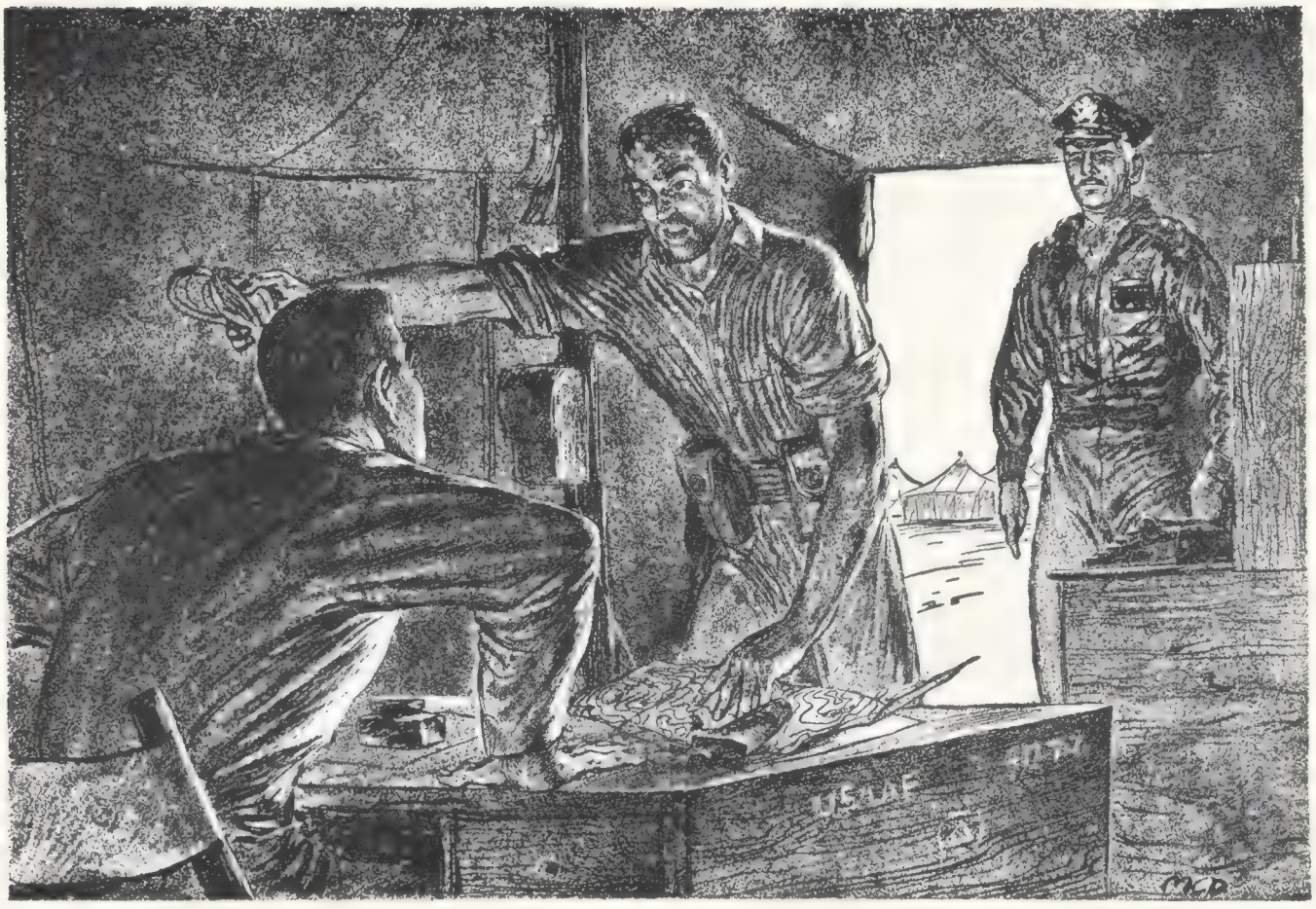
"Then the Japs tried different tactics. They sent a number of Shans, Indians and Burmese up to spy on us. The Kachins spotted these people quickly, and we arranged for them to get information that we had a well-armed force of fifteen thousand and were preparing to move on Bhamo. This dope was immediately passed on to the Japs, who became pretty worried and stopped their attacks on Sinlumkabar. We then began a series of nightly raids on the outlying villages around Bhamo with good results.

"Our arrival caused a great intensification of Japanese secret police activity in all the surrounding villages. About a week after capturing the Kachin stronghold, a crafty Kachin agent of great dependability came up to us with exciting news; He reported that the whole Jap G-2 staff from Bhamo and all the top officials of the secret police were scheduled to hold an important meeting at noon the next day in a small village midway between us and Bhamo. We immediately radioed Stilwell to send over P-51's to blast the place, specifying the nature of the prize target, and stressing that unless the planes came at exactly noon, they had better forget it entirely. We sent our Kachin agent back into the village, with orders to report on developments, then to withdraw at ten minutes of twelve to a point of vantage.

"We had had varied luck with the air force on previous targets requiring split-second timing. The next day at noon we were all anxiously lined up to see what would develop. By ten minutes to twelve the tension was terrific and by five minutes to, we were really sweating it out. As the second hand moved slowly toward twelve, many of us felt that another golden opportunity had been lost; but just at the stroke of twelve, six beautiful P-51's, flying very low, swooped down over Sinlumkabar, coming silently from our rear, and dived toward the town at the foot of our mountain. Each of them dropped two bombs squarely onto the cluster of *bashas*, and then circling, they worked over the flaming wreckage with machine-guns. It was a beautiful sight and made a tremendous impression on the Kachins. We were particularly delighted, because everyone attending that meeting was a deadly enemy who had come to plot our destruction. Later our agent reported that sixty Japs, including the colonel in charge of G-2 and many high secret police officials, had been killed. After this convincing demonstration, many of the chiefs who had been working for the Japs had a change of heart and came up to join us. We put most of them in the jail and continued to expand our own forces.

"Most every day now we received heavy supply drops, and headquarters also began to drop personnel to assist in leading the four thousand Kachins whom we had under arms within two weeks after taking Sinlumkabar.

"STARTING in October, until our victorious wind-up in February, American strength with the Kachins in Area One grew to 130. It was these wonderful officers and GI's who were chiefly responsible for our success. Among them were: Major Newell Brown from Franklin, New Hampshire, who became my executive officer; Doctor Franklin, our chief medic; Lieutenants Freudenberg, Pamplin and Fitzhugh, who was given a field promotion from sergeant; Sergeant Leander P. Jones of Stamford, Connecticut, who operated our large and busy radio station; and many others. All of them proved amazingly adaptable to the rugged jungle life. In all things they had to prove themselves as able and brave as the Kachins, because these proud tribesmen would have



"While I was raging at the Colonel, a General wandered in and listened to my story."

fought under no one less. It was a very high standard, and nothing ever made me as proud of Americans as to see how these ordinary GI's from all parts of the country and all walks of life rose to their exacting responsibilities and did a terrific job.

"We also received a number of splendid British recruits, most of them jungle-wise Wingate veterans who were invaluable. One of the most amazing of these Britishers was Captain Simon Reed. He dropped in to us at Sinlumkabar. As we ran up to help him out of his harness, we were stunned to see that he was wearing a monocle. We never did learn whether or not he wore it as he jumped, but hardly ever saw him without it. In spite of this fancy appendage, Reed was as rugged an officer as we had. Later we found out that the monocle was not an affectation—Reed had suffered an eye injury during the London blitz.

"Our headquarters stayed at Sinlumkabar until after Christmas, when Bhamo fell. Much of my time was occupied with setting up a civilian administration to take care of the Kachin population. We opened the bazaars again, and to keep things moving instituted an OPA price-control system. This was very necessary, as many vital items like salt, which is often more valuable than silver, was in very short supply. Our price-control system worked very well, and the area soon began to get back to normal after the rigors of the Japanese occupation.

"Another problem gave us a lot more trouble than the Japs: Marauding bands of Chinese guerrillas would cross over the border into Kachin territory to ravish the women and loot the villages. Our efforts to keep them away brought on some bloody incidents. The Kachins hated the Chinese much worse than the Japs. We were anxious for our new forces to push on south toward Lashio ahead of Stilwell's forces, but the Kachins were loath to leave their homeland unprotected from the Chinese, their mortal enemies. We had several big battles with these irregular Chinese forces, but finally won our point and kept the Kachin lands inviolate. General Stilwell backed us up in this to the hilt.

"WE were anxious to capture Bhamo with our Kachin forces, but Stilwell wanted his Chinese divisions to have the honor. We assisted in the fighting and intelligence coverage of the campaign very much the same way as we had at Myitkyina. Late in the fall I dispatched three battalions of a thousand men each to the south and southwest of the city to block Japanese escape routes. The first battalion under Lazarsky and the second under Mudrinich established themselves at Mongwi, which I planned to make our next base. The third under Freudenberg took up positions along the Bhamo-Lashio road. This battalion came in for some very hot fighting as the road was the last real escape route for the Japs and was very heavily guarded. Our Kachins were in almost constant action and we took some casualties, though as usual the percentages were tremendously in our favor.

"Christmas at Sinlumkabar was a festive occasion. We rigged up a strange-looking Christmas tree and prepared presents for all the cute little Kachin children. High point was midnight Mass celebrated by Father Stuart, the fabulous Irish missionary who played the principal part in lining up Kachin support for OSS. Many of the Kachins were Christians, and when the children sang the familiar Christmas hymns in their native language, there wasn't a dry eye among the forty Americans present. It was the most moving and most impressive Christmas I have ever experienced.

"After we moved to Mongwi, we were contacted by the American Mars Task Force, a brigade of Texans, whom Stilwell had sent down to cut the Bhamo-Wanting Road. We supplied them with intelligence and afforded them a screen of Kachins as

they pushed through the jungle. Unfortunately they were ordered into a valley which made them wide open to attack, and they suffered severe casualties. They did, however, kill a lot of Japs. . . .

"Around Mongwi we recruited two more battalions. Here we were in Shan country. The Shans were a peaceful people and frequently at odds with the warlike Kachins. This made our operations more difficult as we could not count on the same local support from the natives as had been the case in the Kachin hills. We had one break—the terrain here was very flat, with lots of paddy fields which made excellent dropping grounds. Our rain of vital supplies kept up very satisfactorily.

"From Mongwi we moved down closer to Lashio to the Hsenwei area. Here we had several big battles with the Japs. After one of these, a new battalion commander, a veteran of the last war who amazed us by his ability to keep up with the Kachins, reported one hundred Japs killed. We added the hundred to our toll, which now numbered over 3500. Our Kachin casualties, most of which came from bombing and strafing from our own Air force, were less than a hundred.

"Lazarsky led a night patrol of two companies into a Japanese motor pool near Hsenwei. By now we had armed a number of Kachins with bazookas, which they liked very much. Slipping in undetected, Joe and his men blasted most of the precious vehicles and made their escape unharmed. This was typical Lazarsky.

"We were now nearing Lashio, and our Kachin force had grown to 6500. We had nine battalions, all well-equipped and tested fighters. I was anxious to take Lashio, and went up to General Dan Sultan's headquarters to get permission. (Sultan had taken over command from Stilwell.) He turned me over to his chief of staff, General Cannon. I explained that since the Kachins had led the whole advance south from Myitkyina—a distance of over 250 miles—I wanted them to have the honor of capturing Lashio, the last big Jap base in northern Burma and goal of the long and bloody campaign to reopen the Burma road.

"GENERAL CANNON'S eye twinkled as he listened to my appeal. He pointed out that at Lashio the Kachins would come under Jap heavy artillery, and would be sure to have heavy casualties. I agreed that I did not want this to happen. He suggested that our Area One forces capture the airfield and the railroad station, two major objectives, and leave the reduction of the city to the two Chinese divisions. I finally agreed that his proposal was wiser, and flew back to our base to complete the arrangement for our climactic push.

"Our next big battle was at Imailong, a key point on the Namtu-Lashio road, which was very vital to the Japs. All nine battalions were committed in this fight. There were about one thousand Japs in the town and other large forces in the vicinity. We encircled three-quarters of the town and after plastering it with 4.2 mortars, which were terribly effective, made an assault and took the city as the Japs were driven back. We were in possession of the city by four in the afternoon, but at five I decided we would be wiser to pull back two miles for the night.

"IT was a lucky decision. During the night the Japs moved back into the town and took over again without opposition. Another Jap force came out to encircle our main force. They evidently thought we were still in the town, because after taking up positions halfway between us and the outskirts, they commenced an attack. We watched the two Jap forces battle each other all night, and then at five the next morning, following a heavy mortar barrage, we made an assault which rolled back the startled Japs and took Imailong for keeps. The Japs lost several hundred in this engagement, to our eighteen killed and twenty wounded.

"After this important victory, the front was stabilized a few miles from Lashio for a few days, a time we utilized to complete preparations for our final assault on the airfield and railroad station. Major Brown took four battalions across the river and cut to the southeast of Lashio. Two other battalions circled to the east of the Jap base and I kept three in Imailong. All our battalions, numbering 750 men apiece, were linked up with walkie-talkies. The day before the attack I took a light plane down to Brown's headquarters to synchronize our final plans. Just after I returned to Imailong, we received a very heavy attack from our own Air Force. During the bombing Colonel Peers flew in and barely escaped cracking up. We had been protesting these attacks for weeks to no avail. Naturally we were furious, as was Peers; he took off for one Chinese divisional headquarters and I took off for the other at Namtu, to raise hell.

"At Namtu, I met an American Colonel, acting as Air Corps liaison officer, who was ordering the attacks. He had been getting all American OSS reports of our positions and was disregarding them in favor of Chinese agents, who reported our positions as Jap strongholds. Dressed in filthy shorts and sneakers, I was raging at the Colonel when a General wandered in. He listened to my story and agreed to investigate. The attacks stopped.

"On my return to Imailong, we launched our attack on the airfield and railroad station from three sides. The going was tough but the Kachins and their American commanders fought magnificently against the suicidal Japs and in three days of fierce fighting we captured both objectives. The next day the Chinese infantry passed through us and opened their all-out attack on Lashio which fell a few days later.

"This ended our active participation in the Burma campaign. I managed to persuade the Air Force to fly four thousand of my Kachins back to Bhamo, from where we marched in triumph back up to Sinlumkabar for a two-week victory celebration. Two of the battalions stayed in the south and participated in the final South Burma campaign which resulted in the capture of Mandalay and then Rangoon, as the gallant British 14th Army routed the Japs along the coast.

"In March we disbanded our Kachins after paying them off and giving them decorations. Many of them were also rewarded with hunting rifles and shotguns, which they prized very highly. Our final tally of Japs during the eight-months campaign was 5,011 confirmed dead, with an unknown additional number of uncounted dead and a much higher number wounded.

"The Area One Kachins led by OSS had provided a fighting screen ahead of the regular troops in the 250-mile advance through the jungles and furnished nearly one hundred per cent of the strategic and tactical intelligence for both the ground and air commanders. Total Kachin casualties from all of 101 amounted to seventy Kachins and fifteen Americans. None of the Americans attached to my command lost their lives, chiefly due to the wonderful devotion of the Kachins."

MAJOR JOOST returned to the United States in April 1945. For his extraordinary exploits as commanding officer of Area One in North Burma he received the Combat Legion of Merit with an inspiring citation. It is well to note that during all of his eight months as chief of Area One, his health grew progressively worse but he resisted all efforts to be relieved until the campaign ended. During the final months, at the express command of Colonel Peers he was under the constant care of a doctor, but never left his beloved Kachins and British and American subordinates until the final victory at Lashio.

Married and the father of two children, Joost is now living in Great Neck, Long Island, and working in New York as a marine-insurance underwriter.

Murder *in the* Old Neighborhood

LITTLE GOONEY LOVED HIS NEWSPAPER JOB; AND COVERED THE OLD NEIGHBORHOOD LIKE A BLANKET. SO IT HAPPENED THAT HE CAME UPON AN UGLY CRIME, AND TURNED DETECTIVE.

by JOEL REEVE

LITTLE GOONEY'S right monicker was Arthur Traudt, and there was nothing gooney about him. He got the nickname when he was an orphan lad running about the Old Neighborhood seeking sustenance and learning, helping others when he had nothing for himself, always learning. He was a biscuit-faced little fellow, sturdy, smiling, always "in there trying," in the jargon of the racing-forms.

He began going with Gretchen Humperknickel when they were both still in grammar school. Her father kept the delicatessen, and she helped with the bologna and rye bread and waited on table. She was five feet tall, and she had china-blue eyes and red lips; and when they had seven thousand dollars, she and Gooney would buy Gorman's house on Taylor Street and get married.

Gooney was on the city side of the *Clarion*. Ace Fletcher was the editor, a tough man of the old school. Gooney was absolutely nuts about the newspaper business and Fletcher worked him almost to death. The other workers at the *Clarion* thought Gooney naïve; but he covered the Old Neighborhood like a blanket, and Fletcher could have told them that that was newspaper business.

Harry Hoople's bar was one of the best places in the Old Neighborhood in which to meet the people, and this particular summer night Gretchen was off from the delicatessen, her father's arthritis being allayed for the moment; and Little Gooney sat with her in the back room, sipping the beer which came savory from Harry's clean pipes. There were several people about: Hogue the radio man; Kaston the contractor; Tony Saludi, who worked for the City; Marie Marue and Peasey Webb, Peggy Dale and little Danny Rush; Toy Taye, the hustler. At about nine the prowl car pulled up, and Murphy the cop came in with Jingle and Coney Island Carney.

Everybody liked Murphy, of course; but Jingle was a cross the neighborhood sometimes thought it could bear no longer, and Carney was a Headquarters dick too handy with the rubber hose and bright lights, which is how he got his alias. They had a

He needed only to glance at the distortion of her body to recognize death.

drink in the back room at Harry's own table.

Toy Taye came over to Gooney's table and said: "I hate cops. They stink. You may quote me, Gooney." He was a handsome young man with sideburns and sharp habiliments. He played cards, the horses, dice, all with the use of what he knew as "angles"—little cheating devices to give him an advantage.

Gooney said: "Why don't you leave Peggy Dale alone, Toy?"

The pale girl sat against the wall, profiling her weak face in an attempt to look like Garbo in her latest triumph with John Gilbert. Those were the days of *cloche* hats, and hers was green, *à la* Michael Arlen. Her chest was shallow, but there was a prettiness upon her which came from her youth.

Danny Rush, just starting as a prize-fighter, sat adoringly beside her. He virtuously drank ginger ale, but paid for her whisky and soda out of his slender funds. He wanted to marry her. He would never be more than a semi-final boxer. But he was in love with the girl, and to him, nothing else mattered.

Toy Taye said to Gooney: "Why, she goes for me, pal. Mind your own business, will you, pal?" He was talking tough, like a real gangster.

Little Gooney, five feet six, one hundred and twenty-five pounds, said:

"You know she's engaged to Danny Rush. Lay off, Toy, leave her alone."

"She ain't got no ring, wise guy," Toy said, lifting his lip like Roy D'Arcy in films, a character he admired very much.

"Danny can't afford one," Gretchen said suddenly. "He isn't a crook. He is just an honest little fellow."

Toy Taye's sneer embraced Gretchen. "Don't gimme that malarkey. You chumps are too dopey. You don't know the score."

Little Gooney said softly: "All right, Toy. Go away now." He leaned forward as though he was going to hoist his slight frame from behind the table. Gretchen drew in her breath, but she sat tight. In the Neighborhood you seldom butted in on a quarrel of that sort.

Toy Taye adjusted his cravat. He pretended to be disdainful, but in his eyes a light flickered. It was a yellow light—yellow for hatred and for fear. People had heard Gooney's last remark, his order for Taye to leave. Toy said: "Don't be a slob all your life, Gooney." Somehow it lacked emphasis. He walked out the side door, past the calculating gaze of Jingle the cop and Carney the detective.

Voices were raised immediately, and Gooney sighed, turning to the table where Peggy Dale sat with Danny Rush. The girl's shrill accents cut the low hum of neighborhood gossip: "You can't tell me what to do, Danny Rush. Just because a gentleman is nice to a lady—"

Danny had long arms for a small man. He shoved the table aside and reached out and slapped. He knocked Peggy's head against the wall. His face was livid.

Murphy said to the other cops: "Get out o' here. This is private. G'wan, and don't be makin' any reports."

"It's assault," said Jingle. "You oughta run that li'l' bum in."

Carney, the big detective, was going past Jingle. Before Murphy could stop him, he had Danny by the elbow, yanking him from the chair. He picked up the young boxer and slammed him to the floor.

Murphy moved like lightning. He grabbed Carney as Harry Hoople slipped from behind the bar with a bung-starter and Peasey Webb outed his blackjack, and even Jingle was edging for the door. He took Carney's elbow and hurled him through the side door, into the street. He followed, saying: "You damn' fool, you were born in this neighborhood, and you don't know better'n that? You'll get killed here if you start shovin' people around. Where you think this is, the silk-stockin' district? You fool!"

"The guy shouldn't hit no babe," snarled Coney Island Carney.

"I've seen *you* hit 'em," said Murphy grimly. "Down under Headquarters, you'd hit anybody."

"Crooks," said Carney. "Murderers. Not no nice people."

Jingle came out and they got into the prowl car and drove away. Murphy would go back next day and apologize.

DANNY RUSH lay on the floor. Peggy was gone. She had slipped out unnoticed during the excitement. Gooney bent over to pick up Danny, and then saw that the little guy wasn't out at all. He was weeping into his elbow. He was weeping because he had struck Peggy Dale.

Gretchen said: "That Toy Taye caused all the trouble. I hate him. Danny has that awful temper, but you know how he is. He cries afterwards. That is why he will never be a great boxer. I am very sorry for Danny."

They were in the doorway which led to the stairs going up over Humperknickel's Delicatessen. Gretchen lived above the store with her father, a widower. They were clasped loosely in each other's arms, and every so often they kissed, like experienced lovers. Gooney said: "Gretchen, I want us to get married. Gorman will take a mortgage on the house—"

"We have got five thousand dollars," she said firmly. "Two more, and the house is ours. Then on your salary we can live—unless you want I should stay in the delicatessen and help Papa and get money for us."

That was where they always paused. The argument was too old to be worked from a new angle. Gooney brooded. Two thousand was a heap of dollars to acquire—in fact it was just about a year's salary on the *Clarion*. He sighed and said, "Okay, Gretchen. I love you." He kissed her again.

She said, "You're so good. . . . Don't you feel sorry for Danny, too? And Peggy?"

"Yes. I feel sorry for anyone in love who can't get married," he said solemnly. He left her then. He knew it was a dig, but he could not help it. He loved her with all his heart and wanted to get married. He was twenty-two, and had been making his own way for eight years. He felt he was a man.

He crossed Main Avenue and was going down toward Kay Street, where he had a room, when he saw Toy Taye in his roadster, driving fast and turning into Broad Street. The prowl-car went by, with Jingle and Murphy making their round before Murphy turned in. Murphy didn't have to prowl. He was special, attached to the neighborhood because he knew so much about it. He rode with Jingle because he wanted to keep track of things. He waved to Gooney, and the car went over toward Clark Street.

Gooney turned at the vacant lot and started across the narrow footpath cut between the weeds. Gorman owned this lot at Kay and Clark, and it was considered quite valuable; but Gorman was holding it for better times. It was one of the few empty spots left in the neighborhood. Gooney lived just beyond its south border, and the footpath was a short-cut, going home.

If the moon had not been just right, he would never have seen the white of the girl's clothing. But he saw it, and he stopped, and his stomach turned over. Newspaper business had given him prescience about things of violence. He could feel them, through his skin, and they were horrible, but he could not go away from them. The instinct drove him closer, in fact, sweating, white-faced, hands wet, nausea griping his innards.

The moonbeam fell across the features of Peggy Dale. She lay on her side, and the white which showed was the slip beneath her dark dress. Her head was oddly twisted to one side. He needed only to glance at the distortion of her thin body to recognize death.

He backed off, one hand gripping his middle. He walked, staggering a little, toward Main Avenue. He got to the corner and headed for Zack's Drugstore. The prowl car came purring, and he stopped, grateful. Jingle had dropped Murphy, but any cop looked good to Gooney right now. He stammered the dire news, and Jingle slammed into gear and made for the empty lot.

Gooney went on. He got to the phone, and Ace Fletcher was on. He repeated his news, carefully spelling Peggy's name, giving her address. He ended: "Jingle's over there. They'll pinch Danny Rush for sure, Ace. But Danny never killed her in that corner lot."

Ace said: "You're a reporter, Arthur, remember? Murphy's the cop; Jingle is a jerk; and you are a reporter. Describe the body with more care, please. And get me pics—never mind how you get 'em, but get 'em! Things are dull, this may be a sensation."

There were times when newspaper business did not seem so swell, when Ace seemed a marble-hearted tyrant. . . . Gooney hung up the telephone and trudged back to the corner lot. The prowl car was standing empty. The body of the girl lay as he had seen it and a couple of neighborhood characters were creeping closer, curiosity consuming them.

There was no sight of Jingle. Gooney went near the dead girl, some instinct driving him to stand guard. The characters sniffed murder and began chattering, like a chorus in a Greek drama Gooney had seen at a college he had once covered for commencement.

Then Jingle came around the corner of the building where Gooney had his room. He was jerking Danny Rush by the arm. A taxi came wheeling up, and Coney Island Carney descended and said to Jingle: "I got here quick as I could. Glad yuh phoned me, chum. Lemme have this dirty so-and-so." He grabbed Danny away from Jingle and slapped him viciously across the face—once, twice.

Jingle said: "I seen him walkin' away from here. With me own eyes, I seen him, not fifteen minutes before Gooney turns up the body. Jealousy, that's what. You seen it in Hoople's, you seen him clip 'er one."

Carney slapped Danny again. Danny could take it—he was a boxer; but his nose was bleeding. And it was better, when the cops started on you, not to be so tough. Then you could pass out, and not know what they were doing to you with the rubber hose and the glaring light and the other things, not so nice.

Gooney walked away from the body, past the cops. He saw that Peggy Dale had been hit, all right, and choked too. He knew all the signs of death by asphyxiation, and she had probably been killed by the broken neck, as her face was not red enough for strangulation to have killed her.

He kept on going to Murphy's apartment, where he rang the bell. The good cop came tousle-haired in pajamas like a Japanese print of sunset, and listened gravely, while donning street clothing.

Gooney said: "I saw Toy Taye going away from that place, too. But I'm not saying it was Toy—although he ran after her and she sort of went for him, and you know how those things can happen."

"I know Taye's no good," said Murphy. "I'll see what I can do for Danny. But if they can get him booked and put him in Coney Island's hands, he's in for it." The lined, serious face of the neighborhood cop was sad. "Police work ain't exactly nice, Arthur."

"Danny didn't do it," said Gooney. "He loved her."

"I know, I know." Murphy put on his hat. "Let's go, Arthur."

THEY went out then, and Gooney trudged toward Clark Street, where the Dales lived. He had known them always—decent, hard-working people. George Dale was a mason, and his wife worked in the five-and-dime. They owned a small house and rented an upstairs flat to a young couple. Gooney had thought wistfully of that flat for Gretchen, but she had the bug about buying Gorman's house, and Pop Humpernickel supported her.

The lights were on, so he would not have to break the news. He went slowly up the steps. A detective

opened the door, all set to grab a suspect if necessary, saw Gooney and grunted.

In the tiny living-room Mrs. Dale wept, and George was hard-faced against the wall, taking it standing up, the hatred already in him. He said thickly: "She was out with Rush. I never wanted her to go with that bum, that prize-fighter." A detective was taking it down in shorthand. Gooney shook his head, but there was nothing he could do to stop the bitter tirade. George said: "She never came home. It was past time, but she never came."

They were trying to trace movements after leaving Hoople's saloon. Gooney would have bet his shirt she slipped out and joined Toy Taye. That she rode around in Taye's flashy little roadster until shortly before she was killed in that empty lot. Someone would turn up that information, he was certain. He moved close to Mrs. Dale and whispered: "I'd like a nice picture for the paper. You know, one that looks good."

"Oh, Arthur," moaned Peggy's mother. "Must we go through that?"

"They'll print bad ones," Gooney said sadly. "It's better to give me a pretty one."

"She was going to have one taken. She never did," mourned the mother. "All the pictures she had, she gave away to boys. I've only snapshots." She went to an album on the table in a corner. George Dale still talked to the detectives, cursing Danny Rush. Mrs. Dale brought the album, and Gooney selected a bathing-suit shot. Peggy was too thin for beauty, but it was clear and not too bad. It would not satisfy Fletcher, he knew.

"There's her graduation-class picture," said Mrs. Dale. "And this picnic thing. That's all. They were up the river, having a picnic. Five years ago. Peggy was twenty-four, you know. Two years older than Danny Rush. That's why I was against him. He's too young. And that temper—he always had it, even as a baby. A bad temper."

IT was no use trying to defend Danny. They had him pegged for the killer. They had picked him up around the corner, and he had been excited and frightened when Jingle nailed him, the detective in the hall told Gooney. "Knocked her off and was hangin' around the scene. They do that," the detective said. "That's the way them criminals do."

There was no use telling him that Danny Rush was not a criminal. Gooney went out and trotted down to the *Clarion* office and went into the city room. Fletcher tilted back his eyeshade and said: "Gimme the pics! . . . Don't you know how late it is?" He stared at the snapshots and said harshly: "Traudt, you got to do better 'n this. Dammit, the neighborhood is hoppin' over this murder. Nine people have called, demanding the death penalty for Rush."

"But he didn't do it," Gooney started to say. He checked himself. Fletcher hadn't heard. He rattled on: "This has all the elements of a great story. I'm giving you a chance at it because you know those people. You find out everything there is to know and write it. Do it from the angle that the prize-fighter is guilty, the family to be pitied. Get the public sold on your side by slanting your stories. . . . You know how to do it, Traudt—you've watched Hudkins and our other aces."

Gooney inhaled, filling his chest with air. It was the first front-page story he had ever been assigned alone. He stared at the editor.

Fletcher said: "Well, go on. You don't need sleep, do you? Get to work."

Gooney said: "He's not guilty."

"What?" Fletcher stared. "You've got evidence someone else did it?"

"No. But someone else was around and could have done it," said Gooney. "And I just don't believe Danny did it."

"Look, they'll have a confession out of him before morning," said Fletcher. "That little bum already slapped her; he was at the scene of the crime; there had been a jealous quarrel. The most popular of all motives for crimes of violence, Traudt, is jealousy of womankind or mankind, one for the other. He had it; he had opportunity; he is known to have this terrible temper. Coney Island Carney has got him and is breaking him down. That all adds up to a murder rap for Rush, young man."

"I know," said Gooney. "And I don't like it. Let me work the other side, Ace; let me try to prove Danny is innocent. Let the *Star* try to burn him—they'll fall for that quick as—" He almost said "quick as you did." He gathered himself and went on: "I don't want us to miss any boats, Ace. But I know I'm right about this. Let me work the other side of the street."

"Now look, Traudt, you're a hard worker. You're a good boy in a lot of ways." Fletcher's voice was rising, his face was empurpled. "And you're the damnedest sentimentalist that ever lived. I don't care if Rush is your pal; I don't care if he's a lodge brother; I don't care if he's your goddam cousin. *Go out and get the story the way I told you and more pics, dammit, more and better pics.*"

Gooney said: "Okay, Fletch. Except you better put Hudkins on it—to make sure you got your angle. Because I know Danny didn't do it. You can't let them burn a guy who isn't guilty." He walked out of the city room before Fletcher could answer. The city editor strangled, screamed incoherently, and called for Hudkins.

DOWN at Headquarters they had Taye, but they were not getting any place with that sharpster. There was no sign of Rush nor of Coney Island Carney. Jingle was lurking about, acting like a detective, which he was not.

Murphy said to Taye: "But you admit you rode her around in your car after she left Hoople's saloon?"

"Yeah, I rode her around. My car's a roadster and the top was down. People seen us. She got out in front of Humperknickel's Delicatessen. I never seen her again."

"You had a quarrel with her?"

Toy Taye said: "She was wearin' a dinky ring, see? Rush give it to her that night. It was worth maybe a C-note. I kinda laughed at it." He flashed a large, slightly yellow diamond on his not immaculate hand. "She got sore, sure. But she got over it. She was a whisky-head, anyway."

Murphy said: "You were heard quarreling with her on the corner of Main and Kay. You left her soon after?"

"Right away after," Taye said. "I got an alibi. I was in Geoghan's Bar, and ten people'll tell you so."

"The wrong kind of people," Murphy said gently. "Those Geoghan alibis stink."

"They stand up in court," sneered Taye.

Gooney looked at the sharpster. The yellow fear still lay close to the surface of his shallow eyes. He was flashing a big front, but he was scared. Murphy looked thoughtfully at Gooney, then said: "Okay, Taye. You can go."

Toy said: "Thanks, copper. You're mighty big about it, copper." He swaggered like Edward G. Robinson, tugging his jacket down over his hips. The door closed with a bang behind him.

Gooney said: "If Carney got him downstairs. . . . I don't suppose they got poor Danny downstairs, huh? They took him out to one of the precincts, I bet."

Murphy nodded, eyes flicking to the door of the small room. Even Murphy had to respect downtown politics, Gooney reflected sadly.

The neighborhood cop said: "It could easy be that rat, Taye. What a heel that guy is!"

Gooney said: "I didn't see any ring on Peggy. But if it was a small one, mebbe I wouldn't notice. I'll have to ask Gretchen."

"Yeah. A girl would know," said Murphy. "Ask her, and see if you can turn up anything, Gooney. Or else you can kiss Rush good-by."

He threw a pebble at Gretchen's window. . . . He told her what had taken place.

"I know." He checked the list of Peggy's belongings as made out by the reporting officer, Jingle. There was "*one diamond ring*" on the list.

He went out and found Jingle. He said to the unpopular cop: "Was that ring on Peggy's finger?"

"It wasn't on no toe," snapped Jingle. "The dirty little crumb give her a dime-store ring, and then beat her brains out 'cause she didn't rave over it."

"You had the ring appraised?"

"Agh, lookit the size of it," said Jingle. "A peanut."

Danny said: "That proves it is genuine, to my mind. Danny couldn't afford a big one, but he bought a small, real one."

"Agh," said Jingle. "You never been a cop; you don't know nothin', Gooney."

"You're so right," murmured Gooney. He went out of the station and it was past midnight. He deliberated. He did need sleep, and he did not see what he could do now, while the neighborhood slept. He would ask Gretchen tomorrow if Peggy had been wearing the ring in Hoople's.

Supposing Peggy had put on the ring when she left Hoople's, to impress Toy Taye, not with its value, but with its meaning—that she was going to marry Rush very soon? That would have started a row, all right.

It was not good enough. It was not motive enough. Yet Taye had been frightened, down at Headquarters. Under his bluff he had been shivering with fear. Why had he been so afraid?

He walked toward his apartment, changed his mind. He paused before Humperknickel's, and threw a pebble at Gretchen's window. In a moment she was leaning out, staring at him; in another moment she was down at the door, wrapped in a heavy robe.

He said: "Was Peggy wearing an engagement ring in Harry's?"

"Oh, no," said Gretchen. "I'd have seen it."

He told her what had taken place. She said thoughtfully: "I could get you a picture—I have a cabinet photo, I think. Come into the hall."

Pop wouldn't like if they went upstairs, and Gretchen not dressed, so he lingered in the downstairs hall, which was wide enough to accommodate a table and an old-fashioned hat-rack with a middle compartment for overshoes and an umbrella-stand all in one hideous piece of furniture.

Gretchen returned dressed in a skirt, blouse and brogues, bearing pictures. There was one photograph of Peggy, inscribed in a schoolgirl hand, *"Love to Gretch."* There was that same picnic shot, in which Gretchen was ladling soup. Gooney had been working that day, he supposed—they were kids then, five years ago, but he always was working. He looked idly at the group shot, picked out Toy Taye in flashy garb, and Peggy, laughing and hugging the arm of a big man.

Gooney said: "That's Coney Island Carney—quite a coincidence, huh?"

"You'd just started, then, with the *Clarion*, as copy boy," she said. "Pop made me go on the picnic because we furnished the salami and stuff."

Gooney said: "Five years ago. Time gets away. Five years from now Danny Rush'll have been burned four and a half years if I don't do something quick. They're giving it to him, Gretchen and he didn't do it."

"He could have," Gretchen said.

"No. She was choked, too," Gooney said. "Not choked to death, but you can see the marks on her. Danny might slap her, sure. But he'd never throttle her. Danny loved her."

Gretchen said: "I suppose you could slap me but not strangle me! I—"

THERE was the growl of a siren. A car swung past the delicatessen. Gooney tore open the door and went onto the street. A big Headquarters car was pulling up at the vacant lot owned by Gorman, the lot where he had found the pitiful, thin body of Peggy Dale.

He said to Gretchen: "Go upstairs. There's something going on. That's Coney Island Carney—and there is poor Danny."

Then Gooney ran across the street and over to the lot. There were other detectives and one of them was in charge—a beefy officer named Gryce. He said: "Okay! Reënact the crime."

Danny was bent over. They must have been hitting him in the belly, thought Gooney. His face was contorted and his eyes wild. He said: "I dunno what you're talkin' about."

"How'd you kill her?" demanded Gryce. "Just where'd you hit her?"

"I never did," said Danny dully.

Coney Island Carney said: "I told yuh. He signed the confession, all right. But he didn't even know the score. You got no finesse, Gryce. You hit 'em too hard. Yuh got to tease 'em along."

Gryce said: "You're tellin' me, Carney? Why I was gettin' confessions from hard guys when you was a flunker in grammar school."

Danny Rush, handcuffed to a uniformed cop, showed no interest. His head hung on his chest. Gooney slid close to him. The cop looked tolerantly at the small reporter.

Gooney's eyes were bright, going around. The scene was grotesque, the big police flashlights showing the tangle of weeds where Peggy had lain, the men throwing shadows unbelievably long and out of focus. Coney Island Carney was sneering at Gryce—he had a hard, cruel face and he licked his lips as though they were dry.

Gooney whispered: "Danny! Brace up, Danny!"

"I kin take it," mumbled the little fighter through puffed lips. "But these jerks can sure dish it out."

Gooney said sharply: "Listen. Where did you get the ring you bought Peggy?"

Danny's head came up. He said fiercely: "You kiddin'?"

"I wouldn't kid you, Danny. You're my friend. I got to know about the ring. It may be awful important."

Danny said: "I got into a crap game with Toy Taye. I lost the dough. That was one of the reasons—I never bought the ring, Gooney."

"Ah-h-h," said Gooney. "That's what I wanted to know." He went past Gretchen. She was watching with wide eyes while the detectives argued about who had hit Danny Rush the hardest, and if it was good policy. She was faintly ill, and she turned when Gooney touched her elbow. Gooney said: "Those pictures. We forgot the pictures. That picnic shot shows both Toy Taye and Carney, here. That'd make a good shot for the papers."

The cop reached out a big paw. He swung Gooney around.

"What's that?"

"Your picture, with Peggy Dale and Toy Taye. On a picnic five years ago," said Gooney. "Remember?"

"You put that in the paper," Carney breathed, "and I'll have you down under Headquarters. You understand, Gooney? You dare put that in—"

Gooney laughed. "You're telling the *Clarion* what to print?"

Carney said: "I'm tellin' you. Lay off that picture—"

Gretchen and Gooney were already gone—back to get the prints. Gryce was trying to make Danny reënact the crime, with no success. The thing was a fizzle; the stenographer put aside his notebook. Danny Rush was apathetic, expecting nothing better than more beating, more torturing lights. Carney wheeled and strode across the street, in the wake of Little Gooney and his diminutive Gretchen. Toy Taye's car came around the corner.

IN the hallway, Gooney took the prints and examined them again. Gretchen said: "Carney was following us."

"Yeah," said Gooney.

Gretchen said: "I saw Toy Taye in his car, coming this way."

"Yeah," said Gooney.

There was a little pause. Then Gretchen said: "I'm scared."

"Yeah," said Little Gooney.

The hall door banged open. Carney stood like a thunderhead, glaring at them. "That was five years ago, see? That ain't news now."

Gooney said: "I think Toy Taye saw you."

Carney wheeled around. He had fists like hams. He stared out into the street through the open doorway. The roadster had paused beside the squad car.

Murphy got out of Toy Taye's roadster. Carney started. Gooney said: "Murphy's been checkin' around on things. Wonder what he found."

The neighborhood cop went over and spoke to the man who was handcuffed to Danny Rush. The officer produced a key and unlocked the cuffs and Danny was free.

"I said he wasn't guilty," Gooney shrugged. He rolled up the large glossy print of the picnic. "I'll bet Murphy has arrested Toy Taye. That no good is ripe for a pinch."

Gretchen said: "Oh, get Danny. I'll make coffee and feed him. Oh, the poor boy must be starved and dead, the way these terrible police treated him."

Carney made a lunge. He grabbed the rolled photographic print from Gooney's hands, knocking him against the wall. He grunted: "Aha! You ain't tyin' *me* in with this thing!" He tore the picture to pieces.

Gooney said: "Huh! Peggy's family have the same shot. There must be a hundred in the neighborhood, showing you went with Peggy. People almost forgot, because it didn't last long. You're such a hog, Carney."

The detective backed one step. "I'll take care of you later, wise guy. Right

now I want that killer!" He rushed off the steps and down the street. Murphy and Toy Taye were in the lot, and Taye was doing some talking, Gooney thought. Carney lumbered along, a big, heavy man.

Gooney began to run also. He was a good runner. He had learned to be speedy when he was a little kid, and the toughs were wont to pick on him He caught up with Carney, but ran on the grass, easily, at the man's elbow. They came to the lot, and Toy Taye was saying: "I on'y seen him. I didn't see nothin' else, on'y him, bendin' over—"

Taye caught sight of Carney, running. His face turned whiter than any sheet; his mouth popped open. He began suddenly to run.

Carney's hand went to his hip pocket. Gooney came off the grass, pouncing. He grabbed the gun and hung on for dear life. Carney tried to kick him.

Holding the gun-bearing wrist with his left hand, Gooney reached suddenly upward. He took a firm hold on Carney's ear with his right hand. Making a little jump, he leaped into the air, using wrist and ear for leverage.

Like a catapult, he unleashed a spring. His head was the missile. It cracked on the point of Carney's prognathous chin.

The big detective sagged. Gooney swung the gun away from him. He said to Murphy as Carney hit the dirt: "He was going to shoot Taye as he tried to make a get-away. Then he was going to say Taye gave her the ring. But Taye won Danny's money, and the ring was something else again. Where did you get the ring, Taye? It's hot, ain't it?"

MURPHY said, "I can tell you the ring is hot. I checked it when you spoke about it, Gooney. It was stolen from Mandel's jewelry shop with a trayful of others. They didn't get the big stuff, from the vault—just the junk from the little safe."

"I ain't talkin'," said Taye. He had fallen over the foot of a detective who happened to be in his way, and now he picked himself up, dusting his loud clothing. "I want a mouthpiece!"

"He was willing to put Carney here, on the lot," said Murphy. "I told him it was him or whoever had killed the girl. He was here—you saw him. He was in that roadster with the top down. He had to see something."

Taye said: "Murder I'll talk about." The fear was a big thing now, tearing him open. "Murder ain't for me . . . I seen Danny leave her. I was coastin', see, waitin' to find out what happened. I told you the truth about before then. I seen Danny talk to her, seen her give him the brush, just like she had me. Then I seen Carney. They went into the lot and began arguin'. I could hear her say somethin' about she'd marry Danny, and the hell with it. Then I couldn't see her. Only him. He bent over, then he come back and began running."

Carney was trying to get up, but the handcuffs were on him now. Murphy said tightly: "The worst thing a cop can do is hang them things on another cop. You better not say anything, Carney. It looks like a bad rap."

"It was a damned brutal murder," said Gooney flatly. "He started to throttle her. He found out he'd broken her neck, so he stopped. He must have been conscious of what he was doing, to stop choking her, to know she was dead."

"Two-timin' little—" Carney spat, then desisted, grinding his teeth.

Gooney said: "You shouldn't speak that way. She's dead. She was always my friend and Gretchen's."

They hauled Carney away. They took Toy Taye too, as material witness. Gryce seemed amused by the new twist of circumstances. Murphy sighed.

Gooney said: "That picnic picture was the tip-off. People had forgot Carney and Peggy were in love one time. Five years ago. Gretchen was there."

"They had a row that day," said Gretchen. "A big one. They were always fighting. . . . I don't think Carney really loved her. . . . Oh, poor Danny!" She took the arm of the bereaved, dazed little fighter. "In the delicatessen are sandwiches. We'll make a pot of coffee. Arthur will be back from writing his story—"

"Omigosh! The story!" Gooney was running. He paused at Dale's for the picnic picture. George Dale was thunderous in his denunciation of all cops. Mrs. Dale wept and nodded.

She said: "I always feared that man. For years he has been hanging about. Peggy feared him, too."

THE weight of the Neighborhood was closing in on Carney. He'd never escape the blanketing testimony of the people who knew him. Little things would add up; and Taye, the cheap thief, paid graft to Carney, the brutal cop, in the form of a little ring. And then Peggy, the weak girl, would neither return the ring nor refuse to marry Danny Rush—and got killed.

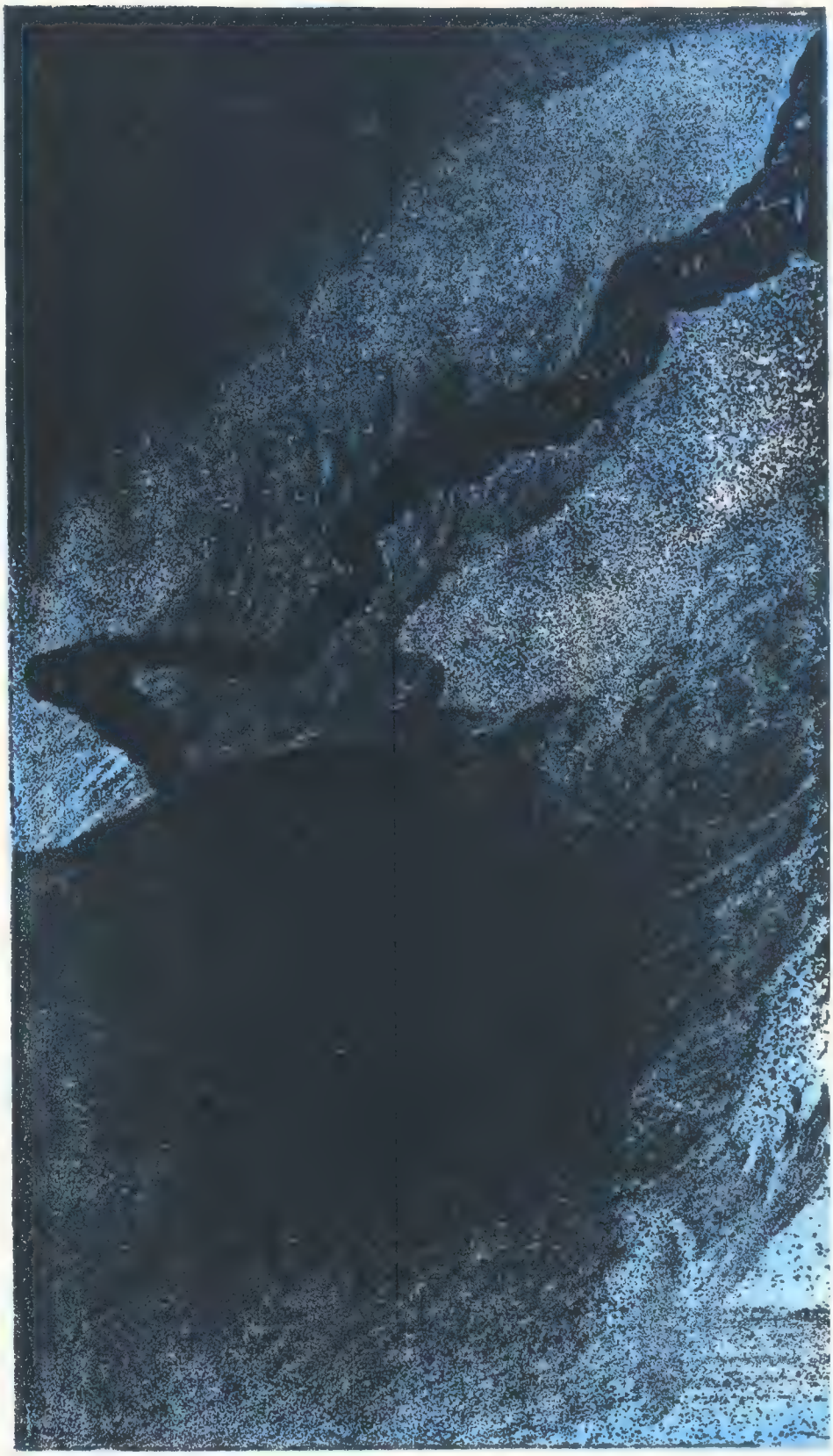
The greatest motive in the world, Fletcher had said. . . . Gooney wondered if the girl had really loved Danny Rush—the way Gretchen loved Gooney.

Illustrated by Raymond Thayer

Like a catapult, he unleashed a spring. His head was the missile.

SIR GALAHAD

Valiant is the word for G. I. Joe and the many other homing pigeons that flew vital battlefront messages.



ON October 18, 1943, an Allied soldier in the freshly captured Italian village of Colvi Vecchia slipped a message into a tiny capsule attached to a homing-pigeon's leg, tossed the bird into the air. Like a blue-feathered comet, the bird streaked over the smoking, shell-torn countryside as though he knew that the lives of an entire Allied brigade, occupying the village, depended upon him.

In twenty minutes "G.I. Joe" flew to the Allied airport twenty miles away. He arrived there at his home loft just as a fleet of bombers were about to roar away on a bombing mission that would have blasted Colvi Vecchia and its Allied troops into oblivion. But the bombers were stopped when the Air Forces commander learned that Allied infantry, with unexpected success, had captured the village ahead of the planned bombing attack.

For that historic flight, "G.I. Joe" received the Dickin Medal for Gallantry, and became the second American homing pigeon ever to receive a foreign decoration. Back in 1918, "Cher Ami," famous World War I pigeon, received a medal and citation from the French government for her heroic flight that did much to save Major Whittlesey's "lost battalion."

The Dickin Medal, an award for animals serving with conspicuous gallantry in wartime, was founded in London in 1943 by the Allied Forces Mascot Club. For animals it is considered equivalent to the Victoria Cross, Britain's highest honor. It may be awarded to any deserving animal in any branch of the Allied Forces.

IN World War II, man's oldest messengers were perfectly at home in modern warfare. Thirty-six thousand American pigeons, trained by the Signal Corps, served overseas and delivered ninety-nine out of one hundred messages entrusted to them on battlefields. More than thirty thousand messages were delivered; and some pigeons, individually, carried up to forty-six messages, a remarkable performance. Pigeons are game and persevering, and they fly undaunted through gales and storms, artillery barrages, ack-ack and snipers' bullets.

On Guadalcanal "Blackie Halligan" was released with a message giving the location of three hundred Japanese troops. He was immediately shot down by enemy fire. But despite serious wounds, the bird struggled back into the air and delivered his message. When word reached General Patch, commanding the American Division, he made a special trip to the loft and decorated "Blackie."

In North Africa "Lady Astor," although wounded three times, flew a message one hundred miles to an American base. "California Lady" was winged by a sniper, but kept flying. For that flight she was awarded the Purple Heart. "Yank" flew ninety miles in one hour and fifty-five min-

IN FEATHERS

by JOHN K. TERRES

Illustrated by John Costigan, N.A.

utes through bad weather, artillery fire and over flattened forests and dead villages to report the good news to the world that U. S. troops had captured Gafsa. On all fighting fronts, where radio or telephone silence must be maintained, pigeons were often the only means of communication.

But the birds not only flew messages for ground troops; they were parachuted to Allied friends in enemy-occupied territory; they flew from observation aircraft to land to report the position of enemy submarines; they carried information between sur-

face ships and submarines to shore; speeded military maps and photos of enemy territory back to Allied command posts; and brought rescue parties to the crews of aircraft downed on land and sea. All powers used pigeons in all branches of their services.

During the war, many Allied planes carried pigeons. In one six-months period, Royal Air Forces' pigeons delivered 302 out of 320 messages, and in three months saved sixty-five R.A.F. pilots forced down at sea. "Winkie," the pet of the crew of an ill-fated Beaufort forced down in the North Sea, broke out of her cage before a message could be attached to her leg. She reached her loft still wet and oil-stained. Knowing the pigeon's cruising speed, the rescuers were able to find the lost men within twenty minutes.

In Hawaii two American pilots were out for a flight in a bomber. Over the ocean several miles from land, the propeller shaft broke and they were forced down. Releasing a pigeon with a call for help, the pilots were rescued in less than forty minutes.

THE use of birds to carry messages is as old as civilization. In ancient Rome, both swallows and pigeons were trained by military forces. Homing pigeons kept Alexander the Great's capital informed of the progress of his conquests. They campaigned with Cyrus the Younger, Hannibal and Scipio, and flew the results of the Olympic games throughout Greece. Two thousand years ago, Brutus sent a message by pigeon to Rome, pleading with Octavius to send him reinforcements to check the besieging armies of Anthony.

By the Sixteenth Century, there were pigeon postal services that the public could use for a fee. In the Eighteenth Century, Nathan Rothschild hired agents to follow Napoleon's armies and send back reports by pigeons. This enabled him to make one speculative gain after another, for the stock-market has always been influenced by the trends of war.

In World War I about five thousand pigeons were used by the American forces, of which more than two hundred were cited officially. According to the U. S. Army Signal Corps, which maintains our military pigeon service, the United States was far behind European countries in the science of racing pigeons when World War I began. Pigeon-flying was already a national sport in Belgium, England and France, and most European countries had well-organized pigeon services in their armies before war began.

At the outbreak of World War II, the entire pigeon service of the U. S. Army was only about thirty enlisted men and eleven hundred pigeons. By the latter part of 1943, it had grown to 145 officers, three thousand enlisted men and fifty-four thousand pigeons. Major Otto Meyer, a slender handsome man of forty, had much to do with its development. In March, 1941, Meyer entered the Service as an officer, and was immediately assigned to the Army Signal Corps' Pigeon Service. Meyer has flown racing pigeons and won prizes with his birds since he was ten years old. He immediately called upon pigeon owners throughout the United States to contribute birds.

The response to Meyer's call for pigeon enlistments was electric. Owners in rural sections shipped their birds to the nearest large cities, where they were pooled with those of city breeders. Soon five thousand pigeons arrived from Philadelphia, nine thousand from Detroit, three thousand from Pittsburgh, and another one thousand from Toledo—until practically every one of the twenty thousand pigeon-fanciers in the United States had responded. With the best of the nation's racing-pigeon stock, the Signal Corps trained a reliable communications system.

Meyer says that body-shape of pigeons is important. Pigeons, like men, may be sprinters, or long-distance runners. Long-keeled birds are best for long flights requiring great endurance; short-keeled birds are best for short flights requiring great speed. Color is important too; Signal Corps pigeons are all dark birds. White birds would be too easily seen and brought down by enemy fire or hungry hawks.

A pigeon has a transparent inner eyelid that he can close against storms and strong winds. In flight, air bubbles accumulate in his blood and bones, making him lighter as he goes along. Homers will endure more than fifteen hours of sustained flight to reach their home lofts. And they are such devoted lovers and parents that they almost fly their wings off to reach the loft when they have a mate at home or young ones in the nest. During the recent war, some birds flew one thousand miles in two days and established speed records up to seventy-five miles an hour for short flights.

Major Meyer says the normal life span of a pigeon is five to eight years, although "Kaiser," an old bird now at Fort Monmouth, New Jersey, has amazed pigeon breeders everywhere by living to be almost thirty years old. Two- to three-year-old birds often make the best flights. After passing the three- or four-year mark, the best pigeons are usually retired to the loft as breeders.

Meyer says the training of Army pigeons begins at the age of four weeks. The bird is first introduced into a spotless loft with all compartments closed except the one the pigeoneer wants the newcomer to occupy. Once a pigeon has made a choice, he cannot be changed. At first the pigeon is taken only a few feet from its loft while the Army pigeoneer inside rattles a tin cup full of grain. This is repeated until the pigeon definitely associates food with the loft. By the end of the week, the pigeon will fly back to its home from five miles away. Gradually pigeons are taken up to one hundred miles away or more and released. Upon entering the loft, after a flight, the bird is immediately fed and watered. Water is almost as important as food, for if a pigeon learns that he cannot expect water on his return, he may stop on an important flight to drink.

Major Meyer tells an amusing story of a pigeon that landed on an aircraft carrier in the Pacific about seventy miles offshore. The bird was thirsty and had been attracted to the carrier by the landing-signal officer's windscreen, which reflected sunlight and gave the illusion of fresh water. The pigeon alighted and tried to drink from the screen. Men on the carrier fed and watered the bird, then released it with the message: *"Drained, refueled and launched—Carrier X."*

After learning to fly to a stationary loft, pigeons must be taught to fly to the mobile combat loft. Major Meyer says this is one of the most important developments in the training of pigeons that has come out of the war. After discovering that pigeons will return to lofts on moving ships at sea, the Signal Corps began experimenting with birds that would return to a moving loft on land.

IT was found that homing pigeons could be carried, anywhere that the Army cared to go, in a loft built on a quarter-ton trailer pulled by the all-useful jeep. They also discovered that after moving the lofts fifteen to twenty miles, the pigeons must be trained all over again to work from the new locality. The lofts are usually moved in the morning. In the afternoon or evening of that same day the birds are turned out in a chick-wire cage. The pigeons now spend every moment looking sharply about at their unfamiliar surroundings and "tuning in" on their new territory. The next morning they are allowed to explore the region a little on their own. After a few short trial flights of increasing distances, they are ready to fly messages all the way back from the front. Combat teams of fifty birds in each mobile loft were tended by two Army pigeoneers, who fed the pigeons about a pound of peas, wheat and corn apiece a week. Every few weeks the pigeoneers moved the lofts to keep close to shifting battle areas, where they could supply advance Army units with birds.

How does a pigeon become familiar with its new surroundings so as to re-

turn unerringly to its loft from miles away? This is as great a mystery as bird migration (an entirely different phenomenon, by the way), and it has not yet been explained satisfactorily. Sight is not important, for especially trained night-flying homers return as well after dark as in daylight.

Major Meyer reasons that the pigeon's return may be accomplished through both instinct and intelligence, but he feels that some day there will be a better explanation. According to Signal Corps men, homing pigeons are extraordinarily sensitive to radio-electric activity. Apparently a bird relates his reactions from area to area and thus sort of *feels* his way home.

U. S. Signal Corps founds in tests in Texas, that the homing pigeons were bewildered by a radio station about ten miles from their home loft. Flights ordinarily made in twenty minutes, when the station was not transmitting, were not accomplished in an hour or more when the station was on the air. Apparently wild birds also are confused by radio waves. The Chicago press recently reported that migrating flocks of wild ducks and geese were disorganized while flying near radio towers.

In the mountains of Italy, the Fifth Army found the effectiveness of homing pigeons was apt to vary from place to place, much as radio reception varies as you move a little radio set through mountainous country. Sometimes even an old reliable bird would have a lot of trouble returning to his movable loft after it had been moved to a new location.

Pigeons are famous for accomplishing whatever mission they are assigned. But not all flights are successful. One of the most dismal failures in homing-pigeon history occurred in Italy. Near Cassino, the 36th Infantry Division sent a pair of pigeons forward with several men on a reconnaissance mission. Late that night, the first pigeon, "Lucia di Lammermoor," returned with this sensational news:

"To the American Troops: Herewith we return a pigeon to you. We have enough to eat. The German Troops."

After a few anxious hours, Lucia's husband, "Dogface," arrived with another vital message:

"You Poor Night Watchmen: With this pigeon No. 2 returned, you should not starve!"

As if in reprisal for such insolence, American homing pigeons in Italy helped enact one of the most dramatic rescues of the war. On the Italian front a company of British Indian Gurkhas had fought its way to the top of "Hangman's Hill," where they were trapped by the Germans. For nine days they fought from behind rocks against continuous machine-gun and mortar fire. For nine days, American airmen dropped food and water to the besieged men, much of it falling to the enemy, however, because of the nearness of the Germans.

An English, a Scot and a Welsh captain volunteered to rescue the doomed men. Each took a different route to "Hangman's Hill," and carried a haversack holding an American pigeon. If unable to reach his objective, each man was to release his bird with a prepared message.

The Scot could not get through, being pinned down by machine-gun fire. His bird returned with this information. Two hours later the Englishman's bird returned. His message said that he had got through. Twenty minutes later, the Welshman's bird returned with the news that he also had arrived safely. Through these messages, the time was arranged to lay down an Allied "lane" of shells to permit the men to escape. That night, unknown to the Germans, the isolated garrison passed through the protective lane of shellfire to the safety of their own lines.

When pigeons were first sent out among the American forces, some of the enlisted men did not always understand the manner in which pigeons should be used. In one company the men will never forget an excited private in a wrecked tank truck who decided to notify his superiors of his misfortune by using the homing pigeon assigned to his vehicle. Only that morning his lieutenant had explained that if he got into trouble, he was to write his message, put it in the capsule on the pigeon's leg, and immediately send the bird back to company headquarters. The private followed the lieutenant's direction exactly. After slipping his written message into the capsule on the pigeon's leg, he hailed a passing jeep, hoisted his pigeon aboard, still in its cage, and instructed the driver to take it back to the command post as quickly as possible. It is said that it was a bewildered pigeon that arrived at headquarters several hours later, cage and all, and was presented to an equally bewildered officer.

Recently, U. S. Army Air Force experiments with pigeons disclosed another pigeon mystery. Birds may be carried up to thirty-five thousand feet and apparently don't mind the rarefied atmosphere at all. While the bomber crews are forced to wear oxygen masks, the pigeons just sit calmly in their cages with their eyes half-shut and their feathers fluffed out against the forty-five-degrees-below-zero cold. For some unexplained reason, pigeons can adjust themselves to the lack of oxygen at high altitudes.

A real Air Forces problem was solved when bomber crews learned a method of releasing pigeons safely at high altitudes and high speeds. Throwing the pigeon carelessly out of a plane speeding 375 miles an hour would permit the powerful slip-stream to smash the pigeon against the fuselage or tail assembly, killing or crippling the bird. But it was found that a paper bag slit down one side makes a perfect container. The bag allows the pigeon to fall free of the plane and slip-stream before the bird threshes its way out, spirals earthward, and then streaks off for the home loft.

Out of the recent war have come several spectacular developments with pigeons not paralleled in the last two thousand years. Pigeons do not ordinarily fly at night, but the Army pigeoneers found a way to overcome this. Pigeons are kept in darkened lofts and released only at twilight. After a while, they are released just before dawn, when they learn that if they fly long enough, the sun will come up. Eventually they make trips in complete darkness, finding the loft by a soft blue light.

Airborne troops may now wear a pigeon vest in which a pigeon messenger can be carried by each man parachuting to the ground. Aircraft also are provided with special parachutes by which cages of pigeons may be dropped to troops just like other airborne supplies. "Burma Queen," when only five months old, was dropped to battle-weary Allied troops fiercely attacked by overwhelming Japanese forces in Burma. She flew home 320 miles over some of the highest mountains in Burma and delivered a message that brought Allied support.

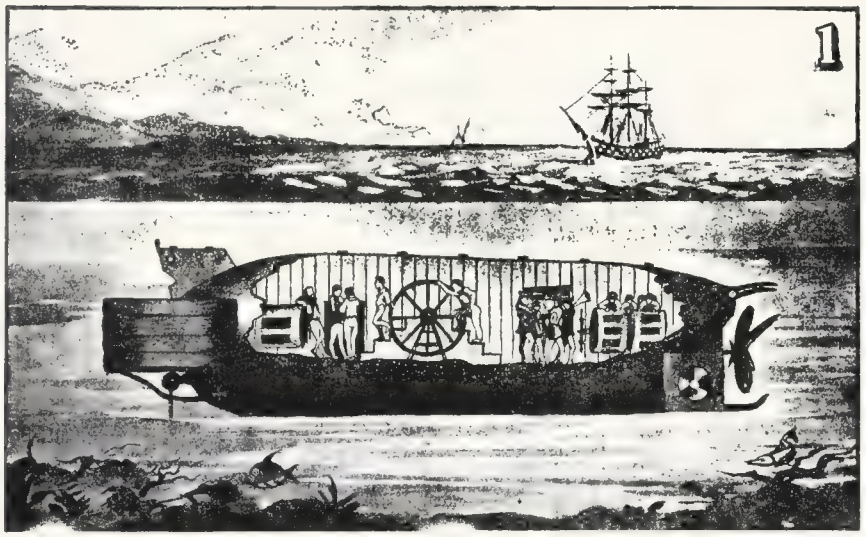
Another new development is a film capsule for maps and photographs that may be fastened on a pigeon's back, thus allowing the bird to carry far more than might be pressed into the tiny leg-capsule. Recently a small sound-recording film has been invented by which pigeons may carry thirty-six thousand spoken words in one trip.

PERHAPS the greatest experiment with homing pigeons is to come. It concerns changes in the birds themselves. Early in the war it was rumored that the Pigeon Service of the U. S. Army Signal Corps had developed a new secret weapon. Not long ago I asked Major Meyer if he could divulge the wartime secret.

"It's a pigeorot," he said with a grin. "A cross between a parrot and a homing pigeon—a fast-flying bird that could deliver spoken messages. We haven't developed it yet, but we're hoping!"

If the rapid progress of our Pigeon Section in the recent war is carried over into peacetime—maybe Major Meyer will get that talking bird of his yet.

MANY INVENTIONS



(1) BAUER'S submarine was built at St. Petersburg in 1855. Propulsion was obtained by means of a treadmill-propeller system. It remained submerged for four hours at the coronation of Czar Alexander II, Sept. 6, 1856, with a band of four musicians!

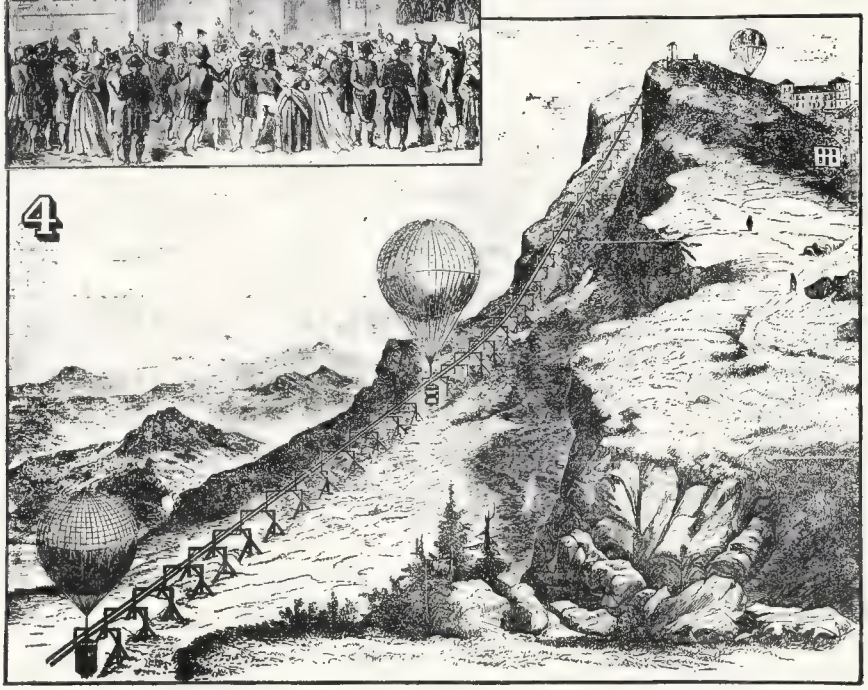
(2) In 1783, Sebastien Lenormand dropped with a large umbrella from the top of the Observatory tower, and landed safely.

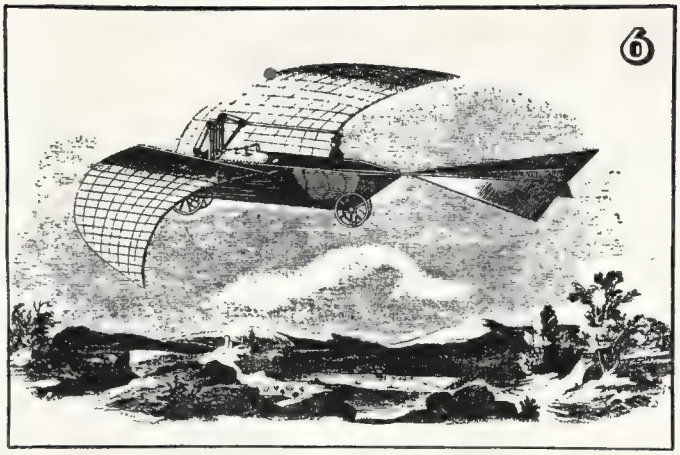
(3) This mono-rail, the invention (in 1878) of the British engineer Haddan, was intended for the development of the "Dark Continent."

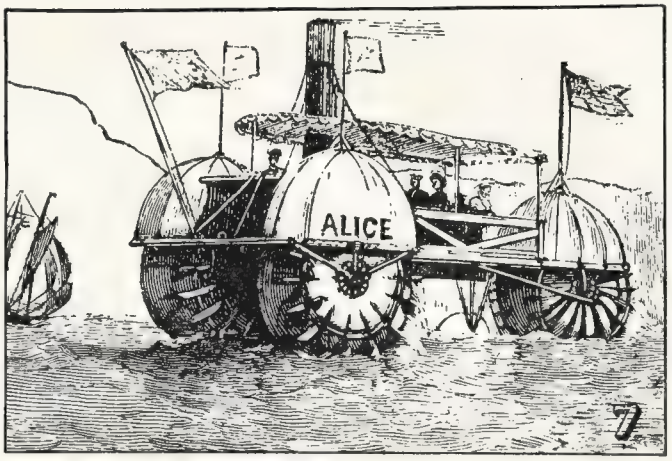
(4) This 1880 project of a transportation line to carry passengers up the steep slopes of Mount Rigi in Switzerland was to have a double-deck car suspended beneath a rail-line running up the mountain. A gas-filled balloon was to pull each car up!

(5) Railway-bridge across the Straits of Gibraltar, 1909: This tremendous project still remains a dream.

Old prints from Three Lions, Schoenfeld Collection.



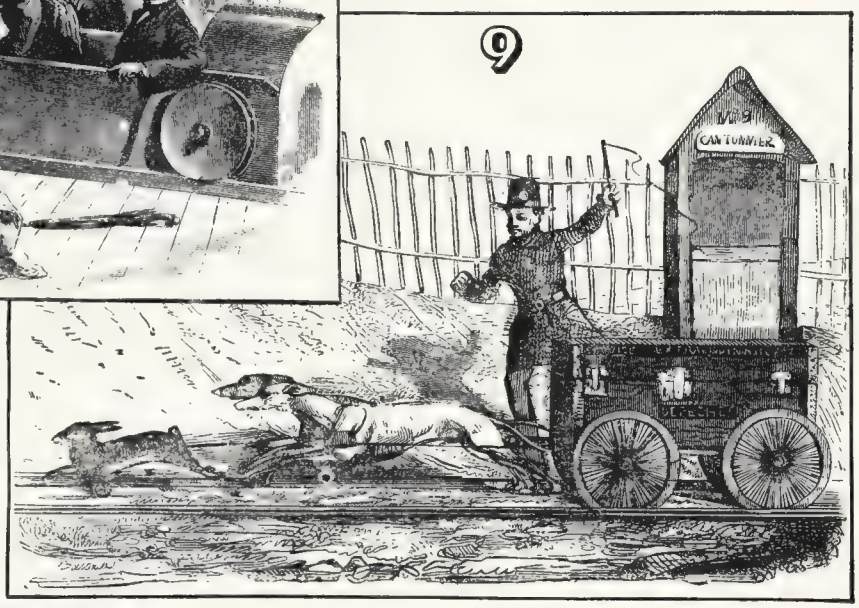




(6) Shortly after the invention of gun-cotton, an unknown German, in 1847, planned to drive this rocketlike airplane with it.

(7) Captain Fryer's "Buoyant Propeller" *Alice* had a trial trip on the Hudson in 1880. It consisted of three enormous hollow watertight wheels with a ring of paddles, and a deck for machinery and passengers.

(8) At the inauguration of the tube railway in London, 1865, the Duke of Buckingham rode on this strange vehicle intended only for merchandise and mail



(9) This "dog-railway" existed between Blankenberghe and Bruges in 1845 for the transportation of fresh fish. A stuffed hare was mounted before two hungry dogs, and a piece of fresh meat put on the hare.

(10) Before steam, the Baltimore & Ohio R.R. as well as the Charleston & Hamburg fitted out cars with a treadmill operated by horses.

Press reception under the bottom of the sea in the English Channel tunnel, 1882: One and one-half miles had already been completed, when work was stopped; and never resumed.

Stowaway aboard

In this strangest of all Mr. Honey's adventures in transmigration, he dares the Deluge itself, and joins the assorted livestock aboard a famous ship.

by BERTRAM ATKEY

TO pretend that Mr. Hobart Honey, in any of the incarnations rendered accessible to him by the Lama's remarkable pills*, ever proved to be a person of any high principles would be to pretend wrongly. He never returned to any incarnation whatsoever in which he was not full of principles—surfeited, in fact; but they were not Twentieth Century principles.

Take, for example, his experience aboard the Ark, way back sometime. If he— But it is better, perhaps, to begin at the beginning. It was several evenings after his experience with Catherine the Great that he swallowed another of the Lama's pills, cascading it down with a double snifter of port wine that made perfectly sure of its transit past his glottis. He emerged from the familiar and temporary unconsciousness which followed, to discover himself to be doing a little riding. If he had still been Hobart Honey of these days, he would have reined in a little; but he was no longer a fairly respectable author of modern times. He had been projected back to an incarnation in which he was Hunezzar, a horse artist—of a kind—in Assyria, or as they called it in those remote days, Akkadia.*

As his mind cleared, he realized that this was no time for reining in. On the contrary! For he was riding what was notoriously the best Arab mare in all of Arabic Asia. Against time!

Her name was Melek; and she was scheduled—in Hunezzar's mind—for delivery to an enormously wealthy old gentleman who had a vast estate on the banks of the Euphrates—a man named Noah.† Hunezzar, who lived a very long way south of Noah's place, had heard from an itinerant horse-dealer that the old gentleman was getting together a bit of a collection of animals, and with this end in view, was paying unheard-of prices for specimens.

"But hearken well unto me, Hunezzar," this itinerant party had said: "They have got to be good animals—in pairs—he's and she's. Half-bred or mongrel stock his Lordship hath no use for. He turneth it down like a flash. Tried to sell him a specimen couple of dogs I had by me. The old gentleman took one look at 'em—nice dogs, in a way—kind of setter-gazelle-hounds with a mite of terrier blood in 'em, maybe. 'What are these?' he said. 'Cat-hounds? Take them out of my sight! They are raising my blood-pressure!' I took 'em away quick. Very austere old party—eyes like double-frozen ice. But *money*, Hunezzar! Sold him a beautiful pair of Bactrian camels I had. Hundred gold shekels—weighed out on the spot. Tried him with a brace of horned vipers I found—these cerastes, thou knowest; they quoil up under the desert sand—but His Lordship was well stocked up on pizenous serpents, he said fairly unto me.

"Friend of mine sold him a brace of skunks—five shekels apiece. Dear skunks, I thought. Never thought of them as valuable, thou understandest. Knowest thou anybody got a brace of well-bred white rhinoceroses for sale? Or a pair of African blue gnus? Wildbeestes, methinks he called them. Or I'll trade in a good quiet old cross-bred bear-cat for a brace of pedigree stinging lizards if peradventure thou hast any. Hast any rattlesnakes? No, I forgot—no rattlesnakes. Serpents is out. Well, I must be getting along, Hunezzar. Keep the sand out of thine eyes!"*

The man had moved on then; but Hunezzar, who had recently gone broke, had not forgotten his words. Indeed, he had remembered them so

*Presented to Mr. Hobart Honey, a middle-aged author of the present day, by a very aged and wise Lama from Tibet, these pills each had the power of returning Mr. Honey for a time to one of the innumerable lives or incarnations he had lived before. Although the pills had landed him in many strange situations he had become a pill-addict. This for the benefit of new readers. —*Bertram.*

*Formerly Sumeria. They were always altering the name of the country in those days. Half the people did not know *where* they lived. —*Bertram.*

†Noah was the name by which he became known later. His name, among the Assyrians, was Khasisadra or Xisuthros. Most well-informed historians agree with me about this. Probably changed it to Noah for easier pronunciation. Not at all sure but what I should have done the same in his place. —*Bertram.*

*A form of *"Au revoir!"* much in use among the Assyrians. Practical, in a way. —*Bertram.*

Noah's Ark

well that at sunset he had promptly stolen the magnificent Arab mare Melek and started for the Lord Noah's place up the Euphrates. Not a man of high principle, in that or any other incarnation. Horse-stealers have never ranked high in the social scale in any age.

But Melek was a hummer. Worth five hundred gold shekels to a wealthy lord like Noah, figured Hunezzar, and he was burning up the plain of Shinar to prove it. It was of course a one-way trip. There was no returning possible. If Melek, at a full gallop that was like a dream of flying, failed to please the old gentleman up the Euphrates, Hunezzar would be in the vermilion. For he had to go on, anyway. If he turned back, there was only one party waiting for him—and that was a serious-minded old fellow who was wholly composed of bones, a toothy smile, eyeless sockets, and no hair, who carried a reaping hook in his fleshless hand. No, on the whole, Hunezzar had to keep going.

No man has ever ridden a first-class Arab mare without loving and admiring her for her courage and beauty; by the time the horse-stealer was near the end of his long journey, Melek was the apple of his eye.

He watered her and rested her at an oasis some distance south of the Lord Noah's place, gave her what food she had carried so gallantly for herself, and settled down to enjoy the victuals she had carried for him.

He watched her nibbling about the oasis pool as he finished his meal.

"Beautiful! If the Lord Noah rejecteth her, verily I believe I shall not grieve—"

He broke off to leap to his feet with a yell. A lioness had launched herself from cover that was much too close to the lovely Arab to give her even the slightest chance. Almost before she had thrown up her beautiful high-bred head, the charging death had leaped and delivered its terrible stroke.

Melek dropped with a broken neck, and the half-starved lioness clenched close to her.

Hunezzar snatched up his bow, and notched one of those frightful Assyrian arrows, almost as thick as a modern broom-handle, to avenge the mare. But this was no matter for revenge. The lioness was not alone. He saw out of a corner of his eye another like her, charging him. She was coming like a raging thunderbolt. There is on this jolly old earth no more menacing, living thing to face than a charging lion. At the last three yards she opened her mouth—and Hunezzar gave it to her full in the armed red cavern she displayed, leaping aside as the arrow sped.

IT was lucky for him that this was a pair of lionesses, ravenous for food. Another of those great arrows through the heart sent his lioness into another and, one hopes, less violent incarnation. The beast on the body of the mare turned only to snarl at him. If it had been the lion—the mate—of the dead lioness, things might have worked out differently. As it was, the first lioness turned savagely back to the dead mare.

Hunezzar notched another arrow and went to her. There was not much in the lion line they feared, these Assyrians. She turned reluctantly from the blood of the lovely thing she had killed.

And Hunezzar filled her and fulfilled her with his huge arrows. . . .

But two dead lionesses are of no value to a gentleman in the business of supplying livestock to a livestock buyer.

It was very awkward.

HUNEZZAR sat down in the shade of a palm and thought things over. And the more he thought them over, the less he liked them.

He could not go back to the old home town. He owed too much there—and he had "borrowed" Melek too long to make it anything but a plain case of horse-stealing.

And what was the good of going on? He had nothing to sell to the wealthy old eccentric Noah. Not even a pair of jerboas, or desert rats. He might have found a brace of vipers somewhere in the sand—but Noah was not in the viper market.

He looked up at a couple of vultures which were circling around, looking at *him* and the dead lionesses. They were about twenty thousand feet out of his natural reach, and in any case, Noah almost certainly was stocked up on vultures.

He looked at the dates on the nearest date-palm. They would not be ripe enough to eat for a month to come. He looked at the lionesses—but he did not care for lion-meat. Did not suit his palate—too rich for his blood.

He looked at the still carcass of the beautiful Arab mare. No, he could not see himself eating Melek.

And that settled it.

He could not go back to be hanged; he could not stay where he was to be starved. He could only go one way—forward.

He laughed, for he was a reckless, agile-witted rogue.

"Forward, Hunezzar!" he said, as if he had the choice of every point of the compass.

"I and my sense of humor can conquer anything—I hope!" he said, and moved out into the desert.

As he went, he thought hard, striving to recall everything he had heard about Noah. It wasn't much. And it had been pure gossip. The Assyrians were a great people in their way, but they lacked telephones, telegraphs, newspapers and radio. But they had camels, and most of the news came by camel or camel-riders. It was battered up a little by these camel-sharps by the time it arrived, but it was better than no news.

HUNEZZAR concentrated on it as he strode across the sand, traveling north, but edging a good deal toward the west, where the Euphrates River ran.

He recalled hearing that Noah had prophesied that very shortly there would be occurring a flood and a deluge that would make all previous calamities of the kind look like a minor overflow of the village creek, and that he intended building himself a sort of ship with which to meet the emergency when it arose.

Yes, Hunezzar remembered hearing that. And the animal-agent and dealer in wild beasts had told him something about this Noah planning to take aboard seeds and animals to restock the earth when it had dried up a little.

Well, that was reasonable enough—call for a fairishly sizable ship, but he was said to be a rich man, and probably could afford himself a yacht like many rich men before him. That, at any rate, had been the opinion of the wild-beast broker; and although there had only been about an inch of forehead between his hair and his eyebrows, probably the man was not far from an intelligent guess at the truth.

Hunezzar's spirits rose a little. He was pretty good with animals himself—fond of them, always had been, he reflected, and maybe there might be a vacancy on the beast staff for him. Would see, at all events. . . .

Two days later Hunezzar stepped out of the desert into a huge fruit orchard by the riverside that marked the beginning of the Lord Noah's great estate.

Hunezzar helped himself pretty freely to what was ripe, and took a rest. He noticed as he ate that the river was running pretty full and high, but even so, nothing desperately out of the ordinary. Not for the time of year.

He assembled himself about a bushel of assorted fruit, oranges, watermelons, and so forth, ready for when he awoke; and then he dozed off. . . .

It was late afternoon when he opened his eyes again.

They fell on a girl who was standing watching him—an extremely attractive dark brunette, in a tattered leopard-skin which entirely failed to conceal a lovely, lissome figure that many a haughty Assyrian lady would have envied.

He sat up quickly, automatically smoothing his complicated plaited beard.

"Good evening," he said.

She smiled dazzlingly.

"And who art thou—and whence comest thou, maiden?" he asked gently, smiling in his turn.

"Ah's no maiden, sah!" she said in a casual, matter-of-fact kind of way. "An' Ah's from Ethiopy!"

"Glad to make thy acquaintance," said Hunezzar politely. "Take a watermelon!"

She took one and sat down close beside him to eat the same. She was like a bit of high-class sculpture in dark marble.

They got to know each other better as time went on. Her name was Kandy. She was—or had been—the favorite wife of an Ethopian ras, or prince, who had led his tribe in an ill-timed and ineffective rebellion against the King of Ethiopia. He had been afflicted with the idea that he would be a better king himself. Of all the duly obliterated tribe, Kandy, an intelligent girl, had been the only one to escape; and for months past she had been engaged in the task of putting as many miles between Ethiopia and herself as she could manage.

But it had been a long journey—as all journeys of which the traveler does not envisage the end must be; and she was tired. Well, not tired *in herself*, she said, wiping watermelon juice off her charming little chin, but in her legs. All that walking!

IT had been Hunezzar's intention to go to Noah, and having told of the misfortune with Melek, to ask the old lord outright for a job—if only as a deck-hand or menagerie attendant.

But in the course of conversation with Kandy, he discovered that he might as well alter this plan. The girl had learned a good deal about approaching total strangers with requests for help during her pedestrian effort from Ethiopia, and had spent the last few days scouting around and watching things from under cover.

Of the Lord Noah she did not appear to be a great admirer. She seemed half-afraid of him, and conveyed to the Assyrian an impression that the old man was a tall, profusely bearded, overbearing, gloomy, sour and bilious person, very authoritative to strangers, practically tyrannical to his sons, sharp with his employees and definitely firm with animals.

He had one most grievous weakness—he was fond of prophesying. Had a passion for it, in fact, and if given his head and allowed to go his own gait, he would prophesy till he was black in the face. He had won a prophesying competition somewhere up the river a few years before, and never forgot it. Not a man of much blandishment, urbanity or charm. He consistently refused all requests for passages on the Ark he had built, though he persisted in prophesying the coming of such a flood that only the fish would be safe—and even they only just. He accompanied every refusal with an adjuration to the denied to take an ax and hie them to the woods and start shipbuilding on their own accounts:

"OR it were better for ye now to make rafts. There is not time to build ships. For the flood is at hand, and the outlook for the people caught out in it is but dismal!" Kandy, in hiding, heard him roaring at a party of tourists from Nineveh one day. But they had ignored his warning.

"And how beseemeth the Lady Noah, Kandy?" asked Hunezzar. "Is she too stern and, as they say in Babylon, stand-offish?"

Kandy said that Lady Noah was quite different. Kind and gentle and motherly, but at the same time, accustomed to having her own way. She had a quick temper, but it was soon over. Just before she met Hunezzar, Kandy said she was thinking of applying to the Lady Noah for a post in the kitchen, in spite of Noah's regulation that no strangers were to be admitted on any account on to the Ark, which he figured was already a shade overloaded.

"Is there any family, Kandy?" asked Hunezzar.

"They's three, honey—Marse Shem, Marse Ham an' Marse Japheth," said Kandy. "Marse Shem and Marse Japheth is married, but dat Marse Ham, he's a single gemmun. Dey workin' all de time, tendin' dem ol' animals. Ain't no chance for us folks abohd dis Awk! Guess we gotta keep on walkin', Hunezzar!"

But Hunezzar was not so sure that walking was going to be the correct technique much longer. He had again stepped across to look at the river with Kandy, and it had seemed to him the stream was running discolored, a little fuller, lipping sulkily at the banks as if it would overflow if any careless person added as much as a gallon to it.

Kandy had noticed nothing out of the way. Hand in hand with him, she had stared out across the water for a while, then turned to Hunezzar, smiling.

"It jes' keeps rollin' along, honey," Kandy observed dreamily. "Lak me!"

"Yes, I know, Kandy. Hope the river contriveth to roll in the right direction, though."

Well, not tired in herself, *she said, but in her legs. All that walking!*

Illustrated by Charles Chickering

But it did not.

By evening it was out of its banks here and there; and as they wandered from tree to tree picking their suppers, a blob of rain the size of a large grape splashed on Hunezzar's face.

He looked up, and between the trees saw that the skies were filling with vast black clouds racing down from the north. Even as he looked, they blotted out the swiftly sinking sun.

"By the sacred beard of Ea, Lord Noah was right!" said Hunezzar. "Come, Kandy! There remaineth but one refuge: The Ark! Let us hasten!"

They certainly did hasten, Kandy leading unerringly toward the Ark, which she had reconnoitered so frequently in the past few days.

By this time they were out of the fruit orchard, on the edge of which began the great shipyard. In the center of this yard stood the huge completed vessel, resting on the ground like a kind of house or hotel or chapel, waiting for the arrival of the water to float her.

She would not have long to wait. There was plenty of material on its way to test her displacement. And it was not mere rain. A dull distant roar drew Hunezzar's head round. He had for a moment a view of the Euphrates through the flying rainblobs, and he saw quite plainly what was on its way upstream—a towering tidal wave like the side of a mountain, swinging toward them at a fearful speed. It was still miles away, and extended far beyond each bank of the river.

Hunezzar caught one glimpse before the clouds opened up and the rain came down solid, bringing with it gigantic bayonets of lightning—so much of it, and in such a frantic hurry, that it seemed as if it were hunting for them, and every second getting more irritated at missing them. Mighty reverberations of thunder overhead seemed to be expressing hearty approval of the lightning's darting efforts. Hunezzar grabbed Kandy's shoulder and shouted:

"Run, Kandy—run like a gazelle! For the Ark!"

Then a fortunate thing happened: A medium-sized example of the rare spotted high-behinded hippopotamus broke away from three men who had just driven it aboard, and lurched back down the gangway. The men leaped after it, spurred on by the furious gesticulations of a big, bearded old fellow who rushed across the deck to the gangway. This left one complete side of the Ark untended.

Hunezzar and Kandy reached it and went up the side like scalded cats.

"Down those steps, Kandy!" cried Hunezzar.

They went down the companion-way.

It was pretty dark downstairs.

For a moment the fugitives paused, listening to the astonishing observations of Noah to his sons as they toiled to get the high-behinded hippopotamus aboard again. Then, not wishing Kandy to be shocked, Hunezzar led the way deeper into the dimly lit bowels of the Ark. They were evidently on the cat deck—not much of a place. It was lit by a few rush candles, and the atmosphere was a little sharpish—or seemed so to people accustomed to the fragrant perfume of the fruit orchard. A child could have guessed that it was not the lily department.

The place was all cluttered up with barred-in lions and tigers, leopards, panthers, catamounts, cheetahs, jaguars, Tasmanian devils, ocelots, ounces and their brethren.

They went down to another deck, just as gloomy.

"What a hooraw's nest! Hooraw! Blast my eyes, what's it coming to! Hooraw! The binnacle's burst and the grog's run out! Who's this? Get the hell off my bridge!" said somebody suddenly, in a low sour voice. They stopped, startled.

But it was only a shabby old rusty-looking parrot, sitting by himself on the railing round a couple of quaggas, next to the zebras.

He surveyed Kandy with lack-luster, bilious eyes, and imitated the sound of kissing.

Kandy laughed, and the uncanny fowl perked up, shifted itself into a more comfortable position, evidently settling down for a cozy chat. But Hunezzar, not liking the look of the bars round a mountainous and vicious-looking old bison bull nearby, hurried her on.

The parrot shouted after them—something about their being a couple of wharf-rats thinking only about their own skins, and leaving *him* there to drown.

"Go it, shipmates! Take to the blasted boats! *You're* all right, Jack—damn about *me!*" he yelled.

They heard him grumbling and muttering and swearing long after they had passed him.

SOMETHING came down out of the gloom to nuzzle at Kandy. It was the head of a gigantic giraffe—perfectly gentle, with great soft eyes, luminous in the dim candlelight.

"Po' pretty ol' Miss Giraffe!" said Kandy, fondling it. Giraffes were no novelty to her. "How yoh lak dis ol' Awk, den? Yoh lak me, yoh po' ol' giraffe—yoh wanna go home, way, way back to Ethiopy!"

Then the foaming foothills, so to express it, of the tidal wave struck the Ark.

It heaved her nearly on end, so swiftly that most of the few candles went out instantly. Big and heavily laden though she was, for a moment she pitched and wallowed, swung and rolled as if she must capsize, then settled, quivering. They could hear the vast waters roaring past the sides of the sturdy craft so loudly that it all but drowned the noise of the startled animals.

THEN a gigantic creature came shambling fast along the dark gangway, muttering and gibbering hoarsely to itself. It lurched between the stowaways, brushing them aside like straws, then halted a second, picked up Kandy like a doll and vanished.

It was a colossal she-gorilla.

Hunezzar turned to follow, but was snatched back like a feather and flung along the gangway by an enormous hand at his shoulder. It was the male of the mighty pair. He padded past Hunezzar, uttering a queer sound like a muffled roar, beating his huge chest with one fist. His enormous fangs were like the tusks of a wild boar.

For a few seconds Hunezzar lay half stunned. He thought he heard a faint far-off cry from Kandy, and struggled to his feet. But a sudden roll of the Ark flung him off his balance, his head crashed against the stout bars of a rhinoceros pen near that of the bison, and he pitched to the floor, his skull all but fractured. . . .

When Hunezzar regained his senses the rolling of the Ark had settled down a good deal. He was still lying on the floor of the gangway or passage. He had no notion of how long he had lain there. He felt sick and giddy. The sound of the waves had died down considerably; but all about him, and in every direction, was the sound of the lowing, grunting, or bellowing animals with which this deck was packed. They were hungry. Now and then the wild neigh of a zebra would rise shrilly above the tumult, and once the Assyrian heard the trumpeting of an elephant. It was now almost entirely dark.

"Oh—Kandy—Kandy—" whimpered the dazed stowaway. Then with a wild effort he pulled himself together and groped his way along the gangway. He had lost all sense of direction, and guided himself by the feel of the bars on each side of him.

He staggered to a place where the bars were very thick and as far apart as the width of a doorway. He leaned against one of these great bars to rest. Then suddenly a huge thing—it might have been a colossal python—reached out of the dark, encircled his waist, and drew him in past the bars. For a moment he felt himself as it were dangling in the dark within this silent, mysterious loop. But there was no constriction, no terrible contraction of the mighty muscular coil above him; and almost immediately he found himself put down quite gently on what felt like a pile of hay.

Something went tapping, feeling, touching lightly over his face and limbs; he heard a great sighing sound like a vast expiration of breath overhead, and he knew then that he had been lifted carefully into an elephant's stall.

He was quite unafraid, sensing that his enormous host had no intention or desire to hurt him. He was quite right, though it was not until later that he learned that he was, so to put it, the guest of one of the gentlest, kindliest old elephants that ever came out of India. He settled down in the hay, and in spite of the stabbing pain in his skull, slowly faded into the unconsciousness of sleep. He felt now and then the light touch of the trunk tip, but that seemed more and more to merge into the stuff of a dream. At first it startled him a little, but a fugitive thought which went weaving through his mind that perhaps the great sighing creature towering over him was also lonely and glad of a little human company, somehow reassured him, and in the end he dropped off without a qualm for himself and only a vague fading dreamlike distress about Kandy.

IT was some hours later when Hunezzar woke, or was wakened. It was still very dark in that vast hold or deck; but above the murmur and movement of the patient beasts all about him, he thought he heard a distant voice calling his name.

"Hunezzar!"

He listened, half awake, half dazed. A bull penned far up the aisle began to bellow, starting a chorus which drowned everything. No, there it was again—very faint above the uproar of the animals—"Hunezzar!"

It was the voice of Kandy—gay, happy Kandy, who had been swept away into the darkness in the grip of the monstrous gorilla. He had dreamed of her—but he had dreamed that she was forever lost.

Yet here—not too far away—she was calling him. It sounded like the song of a bird at dawn.

"Hunezzar! Ah's a-comin'; so don' yoh hide no moah!"

He scrambled along the side of his huge companion of the night, unhindered, found the great bars and stepped between them. Far down the aisle was a gleam of light from a lantern.

Behind the lantern-bearer followed what looked like a load of hay.

But the carrier of the lantern was Kandy.

"Hunezzar!"

She saw him and raced down the aisle. Long before her excited greetings were over, the person with the

"Run, Kandy—run like a gazelle! For the Ark!"

hay had distributed his load into the pens and had come up to them.

"Oh, Hunezzar, honey, Ah thought you was daid or dreffuł hurt. I done come ez soon ez Ah could," cried Kandy. "Dis gemmun is de young Lohd Ham."

HUNEZZAR and Ham exchanged scrutinies. Hunezzar saw a nobly proportioned young man, inches taller and broader than himself, who greeted him with the friendliest of smiles, and in the deep, rolling, musical voice of a Robeson at his rollingest —so to express it—bade him welcome to the Ark. He laughed at the relief in the stowaway's voice as he expressed his thanks

"But the gorilla—that fearful apparition—I thought thou wert in their grip, Kandy."

Ham laughed his deep laugh.

"Nay, Hunezzar, they were affrighted at the tossing of the Ark. The gorillas are gentle—as all the beasts aboard are gentle.* In her fear and bewilderment she snatched up Kandy as she might have snatched up a child. My father saith it is but an expression of the mother instinct. I know not. Maybe it is as he saith. Kandy is safe and unharmed—art thou not, Kandy? But thou, Hunezzar, are bruised and hungry. Come with us, eat and rest!"

He turned to lead the way. An uneasy murmur and rustle arose from the animals—even the old elephant registered a low protest.

"Dey love Ham—all dese ol' animals. Dey don' wan' him to go," said Kandy.

"Why, Kandy, how dost thou know that so soon?" asked the Assyrian.

"De Lady Noah done tol' me," said Kandy. "Everybody loves Ham, she tol' me."

Hunezzar wondered dimly if that went for Kandy too; but before he could speak, Ham turned his head, speaking over his shoulder.

*True. Hunezzar saw that later and secretly attributed it to some queer hypnotic influence over them exercised unconsciously by Ham. He could exercise it over people, too, as Hunezzar discovered later. —*Bertram.*

"Distress thyself not, Hunezzar, if it should seem unto thee that my father maketh thee but little welcome. It is but his manner, and it will pass. He hath had many vexations. But his anger doth not abide. It will abate."

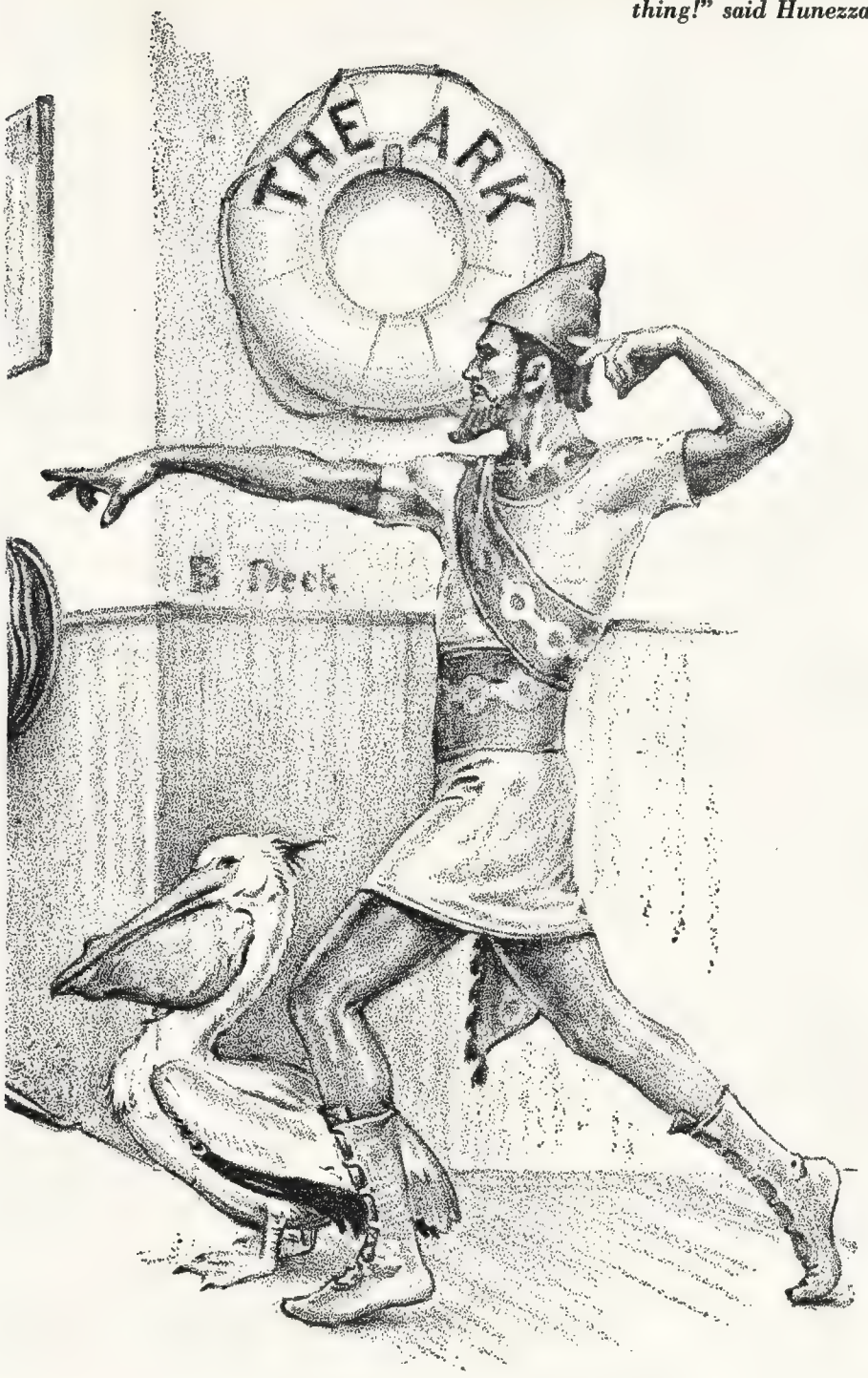
No doubt Ham knew his father pretty well, but it did not look quite like that as Hunezzar's polite obeisance was acknowledged by the big, bearded, fiery-eyed Captain of the Ark—the Lord Noah.

Something seemed to have worked the old man up already, and Hunezzar's appearance came as the last straw.

He started on the subject of stowaways the instant he saw Hunezzar, and he kept on the subject for ten full minutes without a break or a repetition.

Hunezzar took it without a word. He only had to glance over the side to see what the Ark had saved him from. He felt that he could take it as long as the old autocrat cared to dish it out. Moreover, he had noticed a nice-looking, motherly, oldish lady sitting just behind Noah unobtrusively press her finger to her lips as he caught her eye —she was evidently the Lady Noah.

"Half the riffraff in Asia swarming aboard to overload the Ark!" Noah stormed. "I prophesy that grievous ill shall befall all them that come like thieves in the night—that—p'shaw—who art thou? Whence comest thou?"



"I prophesy anything from dooms to triumphs—anything!" said Hunezzar.

"I am Hunezzar the Prophet—from Babylon!" said the quick-witted Assyrian.

"Hunezzar! I have never heard of thee! Thou a prophet! *Thou!* Bah! An amateur!"

"Nay, Lord—a professional!" declared Hunezzar. "A city prophet! Famed throughout the metropolis and far beyond. President-to-Be, my Lord, of the newly planned College of Prophecy soon to be established in Babylon!"

"Should it survive the Flood!" said Noah with almost a sneer. But there was a hint of uneasiness about the sneer. He was, after all, a provincial, almost a rural, or rustic prophet. Nothing could alter that. He had not even visited Babylon for ten years. Locally, for miles and miles around, there had been nobody in his class as a prophet—but this stranger, this professional from the Big City, might it not even be that he was a little more advanced—up to date?

He moderated his tone a little.

"Prophet, hey?" he bellowed. "What dost thou prophesy when the mood is upon thee?"

"All kinds," said Hunezzar airily. "I prophesy anything from dooms to triumphs—the Near Future, the Middle Future, the Far Future—anything!"

"Is that so?" said Noah. He hesitated, then came out with it.

"I challenge thee to a bout!" he said. His folk were gathering round, and Hunezzar perceived that he must be tactful. Whatever form Noah had as a prophet, he certainly was Captain of the Ark—and there was plenty of room overboard for a spare stowaway.

"My Lord Noah," he said, "I will do my best, but think not that I esteem mine humble self to be of a quality which is more than slightly worthy of the honor of a match with thee!"

"Very well spoken," conceded Noah, relaxing a little. "How wilt thou have it? Alternating current or direct?"*

"Alternating, if it pleaseth Your Lordship!"

"Very well," said Noah. He took off a nautical-looking kind of a hat he was wearing, and handed it to his wife. Also his outer raiment. He looked as if he would have rolled up his sleeves and spat on his hands, if he had not been quite such an important person.

"Shem, thou shalt referee, if Hunezzar is willing."

"Willing, My Lord."

"Ready?" snapped Shem, as he pointed to Noah. "Your lead, sir!"

NOAH raked his fingers through his beard, his eyes fixed on Hunezzar, the Babylon outcast.

Then, suddenly, he led like lightning.

"The outcasts of the great cities are an abomination, and they shall be utterly destroyed!" he barked.

"The haughty of the land who comforteth not the outcasts and the humble shall perish and come to naught!" countered Hunezzar.

Noah came back like a flash.

"They that come up like fish from the deep waters shall be violently returned unto the waters! Yea, in the weight of the waters shall they be flattened like the flounders of the deep!"

That was a nasty one. Hunezzar took it full on the chin. It rocked him a little, but he fought back.

"They that abide like fish in the waters shall flourish like flounders! They shall comfort themselves like as the crabs of the crevices and wax exceeding fat!"†

"For how shall it avail the outcast of the city if the city be crumbled in the waters? Whither shall he turn his steps if he be cast forth from his ref-

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* These ancient prohesying contests were either A. C. or D. C.—that is, fought out in alternating sentences uttered by each prophet in turn, or in one long, single chunk by each contestant. Audiences usually preferred the A. C. contest—snappier, not so gloomy, and more easily understood. —*Bertram.*

uge? He shall strike out, but his stroke shall not save him Though he turneth upon his back, yet shall the sun go down upon him and calamity shall descend upon him!" shouted Noah.

"How shall calamity injure him who hath slumbered in the protection of the elephant! He shall stride upon the dry land, and he shall restore and build in the shade of the vine and the olive and the fig!" bawled Hunezzar.

"The trees of the land shall be washed out, and the fruits thereof. Hyenas shall frolic in the groves of the orange and the shaddock and the pomegranate! The wild dog and his mate shall gnaw their bones under the shadow of the barren fig trees!" boomed Noah.

"The horned owls shall witness the safe departure of the pestered outcast ere even the hyenas arrive!" countered Hunezzar, who seemed to be weakening a little.

BUT Noah was only just warming up, and all of a sudden he tore into Hunezzar like a giant refreshed.

"He shall be desolate upon the face of the desert! The gazelle shall flee from him, and the fruits of the palms shall be sour within him. The wild ass shall not stay within his range. He shall totter about! The vipers shall hiss at his coming, and the toad shall inflate and mutter in his throat at the sound of his footfall. When he cometh unto the river, the behemoth shall bellow and open up upon him! The crocodile shall issue forth, and the alligator-gars shall snap at his knees!"

Hunezzar reeled.

"Yet shall he not be utterly outcast. He shall rely upon—upon—that—that—he shall verily rely—he shall not be utterly—utterly—" he fought back feebly.

Noah balanced for the K.O. Hunezzar—everyone present—saw it coming as it were, right up from Noah's ankle. But he could do nothing about it. His lower jaw was aching and stiff.

"The outcast shall be as if he were never within. He shall be as a feather that floateth up from a scratching of fowls! He shall crawl into holes, and the denizens thereof shall expel him therefrom! He shall climb trees, and the branches shall break under his weight! The earthquake shall pursue him. When he avoideth the earthquake, his path shall be strewn with volcanoes. He shall lament, but his lamentations shall be no more than the stridulations of the bony grasshoppers! He shall be as an ant in an ocean! He shall not proceed forward, and backward he shall not go. If he goeth upward, it shall be as if he went downward. Nor shall he revolve upon his own axis. And he shall then begin to enter upon trouble—"

Hunezzar threw in at this point. There was no use in taking punishment like this. As the figurative "outcast" he was washed up.

"He who beardeth the Old Man may expect that which verily shall be his—ha-ha! Hooraw!" said a new voice, rather like that of a radio commentator of a future age. They all turned.

It was a rusty-looking parrot sitting on the roof. Tired of the quaggas and zebras, probably.

Noah was pleased with his victory and did not mind letting people see it.

"My Lord Noah," said the astute Hunezzar. "Pardon the presumption which inspired the acceptance of thy challenge. It was as if a dumb man set forth to command the tornado to lie down and be still!"

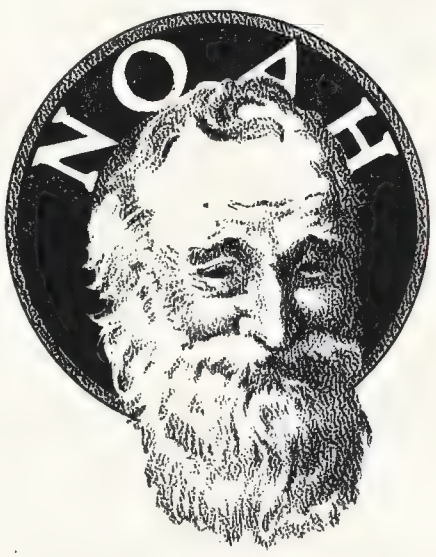
Noah, however, was not a bad old sportsman.

"Nay, lad," he said benignly, "Thou didst not do so badly. Thou hast the makings of a prophet. Art in need of experience – practice – training! Thou wilt be aboard the Ark for many days—I will give thee a few lesser bouts! Thou art not a good prophet—but thou art better than some I know!"

He looked around at his sons, but they happened to be looking another way.

"Thou shalt not be outcast, lad! And it is in my mind that thou mayest be hungry! And athirst. There is no more thirsty work than a prophesying bout. Come below!"

He led the way, bland with triumph.



"Half the riff-raff in Asia swarming aboard to overload the Ark!" said Noah.

AND so it went for forty days and forty nights. But in the end there came a day when Hunezzar stood on dry land with Ham and the charming Kandy, engaged in earnest conversation.

"Thou broughtest her to the Ark, Hunezzar—and thine is the right to take her away. This I deny not. It is the prophecy and decree of my father that I go south to populate the land with my descendants. Do I go alone?"

Both men looked at Kandy.

There was, after all, only one in it.

She looked with wide serious eyes at the Assyrian; then her mouth quivered, and she moved to the Herculean Ham's side. She was, of course, right. They all knew that.

"Come thou with us, Hunezzar," invited Ham generously.

But the Assyrian shook his head.

For a moment they all hung fire

Then Kandy gave a long sigh.

"Well, honey—*is* yoh comin' or is you ain't comin'?" she said with an effort.

Hunezzar smiled.

"I go north, Kandy dear!" he said.

She looked at Ham, then ran to Hunezzar.

"Good-by, honey! Good luck go with yoh!"

She put up her face for a last kiss.

"*Dear* Hunezzah!" she whispered. "We—jes' keep rollin' along!"

She tried to make it no more than a last little joke, but there were tears in her eyes. For it was sad—sadder than anything the prophets had ever pulled. It was a *real* prophecy.

Then she went back to Ham, and Hunezzar resolutely turned his face to the north. . . .

It was not until he came to a green island in the far north that the power of the Lama's pill faded out.

"Here I abide," he said, "and here *my* descendants shall increase and multiply—a race fond of fine horses, and of charming women, generous, fiery, courageous in battle, lovable in peace!"*

He stepped off the curious-looking ship which had brought him there—eager to fulfill his destiny. But it was not to the shore that he stepped; on the contrary. For it was at that moment that the power of the pill faded, and he stepped back into the Twentieth Century flat of Mr. Hobart Honey.

His eyes were absent as he reached for the port decanter, for he was taking a last look at a charming little figurine standing beside the magnificent, statuesque figure of Ham, son of Noah.

Then they faded out. He sighed, smiled and transferred his gaze to his wineglass.

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†Here Shem stopped the contest to warn Hunezzar that logically he was straying from the point—in the direction of a foul—for which he could be instantly disqualified. Like a modern boxer, for example, who suddenly bites his opponent's ear off. *—Bertram.*

*Ireland, obviously. *—Bertram.*

Hello, Angel!

Sparks sends a message from a foundering tanker in this brief story—

by FRED LANE

JIMMY STEVENS? Say, didn't you hear about Jimmy? Where've you been, anyway? Oh—in South America installing transmitters. Well then, of course you didn't know Jimmy was pounding brass on the tanker *Red Arrow* the trip she caught fire and blew up near the Aleutians. Jimmy figured it was his last voyage, since he had it all planned to swallow the anchor and live with Mary on that little half-acre they bought near San José.

Ever meet Mary—Jimmy's wife? You did? Then I guess you know she's about as sweet as they come. Say, it used to give me a thrill to see those two together. Once, down at their place when Jimmy was home between trips, I helped them plant some stuff in their garden. It was a kick to see the fun they got out of planting things.

Sure, Jimmy got the SOS out all right. I was on the *Silver Teak* myself, at the time, bound for the Orient over the Great Circle. But we were too far east to help. It was one of those nasty nights you get up there: rough and wet and thick enough to keep the whistle going steadily. I was sitting in the shack with the cans on, and my feet on the steam radiator, when the distress call came through. I recognized the sending right away—Jimmy Stevens'. Remember that slow and easy fist of his?

Well, the coast stations started blasting for silence, and pretty soon Jimmy had the 500-kilocycle band all to himself. Seems like the *Red Arrow* walked through a thunderstorm, and lightning exploded one of the tanks aft. A couple of the crew were killed, and a lot more badly burned. The fire got out of control in the stern housing, so they had to take to the boats.

Jimmy? No, Jimmy stayed aboard. A lot of those guys were in bad shape. They couldn't last long in the lifeboats in that kind of dirty weather, so Jimmy stuck around to get help. Sure, I know he didn't have to stay after he got the SOS out, but there was only one ship around there that could do any good: the *Ludvika*—a Swedish freighter—inbound for Seattle. The Swedish operator had come on earlier to send in his position, so we knew he was close to the tanker. But he wouldn't be on again until he opened up later to clear the Seattle station, which he did every night—regular as clockwork—but that wouldn't be for another half-hour. So, Jimmy said he was going to wait. And waiting on a burning tanker is like sitting on a stick of dynamite with the fuse lit.

I came on and told Jimmy to get off quick; that I'd stand by and give the *Ludvika* his position as soon as the Swede came on the air. Jimmy answered, slow and easy: "We been on dead reckoning for three days, so she'd have a tough time finding us unless I give him a signal to get a bearing on with his compass. I'll stick and handle it." Wasn't that just like Jimmy Stevens? That big, slow, shy guy who never tackled anything he didn't finish. Remember, in radio school, how he'd wrestle all night, sometimes, with problems on crystal coefficients or image reception, and next day show the rest of us how to do it? Swell guy, Jimmy. When he did a job, it had to be right. No halfway stuff for him.

Well, I sat there, listening and hoping and waiting—and praying too. And I guess the rest of the Pacific was doing the same thing. When Jimmy started calling the coast station at Camel Rock, near Frisco, I tell you I was sitting on the edge of my chair, watching the clock and praying the Swede would come on early—before the tanker went up.

Sam Fox happened to be on at the Rock. You know Sam, don't you? He gave the go-ahead, and Jimmy answered: "I know this is against regulations, but please get Mary on the telephone and relay for us. But don't tell her what's up."

Sam tried to argue with Jimmy, same as I had, telling him to jump while he could. But Jimmy said no. Anyway, he'd already stuck around too long. The boats had gone, and there was a lot of burning oil on the sea—and would Sam please get Mary on the phone.

Sam snapped an okay and told Jimmy to stand by. When he came back again, he rapped out: "Okay, Mary's on. Go ahead."

"Hello, Angel," Jimmy tapped out. He always called Mary "Angel," maybe because she's as close to being one as a girl could be. "Just a little lonesome tonight, Angel, and thinking about you—" Then he asked her about an apple tree he had planted. "Does it still look like a dead stick, Angel?"

The Rock acknowledged and then came back on with Mary's answer: "The buds are beginning to swell, Jimmy dear. You were right; it wasn't dead—it was only sleeping. When you come home, it will be green with leaves and life." And then she added: "Are you all right, Jimmy?" Well, code is cold and impersonal, but just the same you could feel the anxiety in that girl's words. After all, it was mighty unusual to get a message from Jimmy on a coded relay like that.

Jimmy came in, and Sam relayed his words: "It looked dead when we planted it, Angel, but I believe that nothing ever really dies. Still, here's what I wanted to tell you, Angel. Remember, I promised you that when I have my shore job, I'll always call you if I expect to be late coming home, so you'll never worry. So please try to understand, Angel—there's nothing to worry about, even though I might be quite late getting home, this time."

I suppose a thousand pairs of ears were listening, and a thousand pairs of eyes were watching the clock. The *Red Arrow* was still in one piece—and it was time for the *Ludvika* to come in.

Then, a low droning signal broke in, calling Seattle. It was the Swede, and Jimmy hopped on him fast and gave him the dope. The freighter said she was turning around and heading for the tanker's position at full speed. Meantime, Jimmy kept sending out long dashes for bearings; that is, he kept sending until his signal broke off suddenly.

That's about all, I guess, except that the *Ludvika* picked up the lifeboats, and there were no more casualties.

Jimmy? Sure, he got off. That last explosion broke the tanker in two, and Jimmy happened to be on the floating end and drifted out of the fire area. The fact is, if Jimmy had tried to get off when we begged him to, they'd probably never have picked him up—or the lifeboats either—until it was too late. But with the bearings, it was a cinch.

Sure, Jimmy's living on his half-acre, now. He always calls up Mary when he's going to be late. He doesn't want her or the twins to worry. Why, certainly, they've got twins. You ought to know that Jimmy never was a guy to do things by halves.

Canteen Seven

TIMOTHY WINGATE's impression was that he saw the girl at the end of a great vault made of the memories of the last few years. The walls of the vault were in dark shadow. The girl stood in brightness. She was a part of it.

Her blonde hair held and gave shining back the hard high intensity of the Moroccan sun. Her arms and legs beyond the brief sheath of her white dress were tawny from the sun. Even her canvas sandals, striped in scarlet and cobalt and lime, were the colors of the sun in the street behind her.

But to reach the girl, was to go through the shadowed spaces of his memory, and that he was afraid to do. It was too far. He saw Casablanca when he had first come here in November of 1942. He and all the others had considered themselves victorious; they were still new enough to war to doubt the power of fear. . . .

Wingate pushed aside his glass. It was empty, and he laughed. But what was in his head was the oil-slicked bodies in the surf, the faces of the wounded and the ships, the fine sinking ships. "Very funny," he said, so that he could get away from the fear.

"No," the girl said, and suddenly the shadowy vault was gone, and she was right beside him on the café bench. "Not funny at all."

He stared at her. "Who," he said roughly, "are you?"

"I'm Aurélienne Varois," she said. "I want to be your friend, and help you."

Wingate sat very still. He was aware of the brandy he had drunk. He remembered his ship had sailed for home at noon, and at that time he had been glad of the fact. He glanced once more at the girl in the clarity of the soberness fast coming on him.

He recognized that she was just as attractive as he had first imagined. She certainly didn't belong in this spot. The big-eyed proprietor, the Arab waiter, the few *tirailleurs* and Légionnaires along the bar were all watching her. Yet she seemed wholly unaware of them. She gave her attention to him.

"I'm not trying to be rude," Wingate said, "but aren't you mistaken?"

"I doubt it," she said; she slowly smiled at him. "And now, unless you really like the cognac here, let us go out."

"The one-girl rescue squad," he said, but he was rising to his feet. "If my skipper knew about you, I'd be bound for New York."

"Not really," she said. She walked shoulder to shoulder with him toward the door. "We have need of you in Africa."

Wingate stopped and his broad brown hand swung her around in the strip of shade the café awning gave. "Who's 'we'?" he said.

"My uncle and I," she said. She made a slight gesture, and he saw the big car at the end of the street, the liveried chauffeur, the quiet heavy-bodied man on the rear seat.

Wingate said: "I usually don't tell a woman as pretty as you to go to hell. But now I am doing that. And if that's your uncle, ask him for me to join you. Just you—"

"That's enough," she cut in upon him. "I knew last night when I saw you with your shipmates in the Cintra that you can be an absolute fool when you are drunk. I hoped, though, that sober you'd be capable of making some sense. If I hadn't, my uncle and I wouldn't have thought of bothering you."

She was turning, going down the narrow, arcaded street past the groups of staring Arabs before their shops. "By Godfrey!" Wingate said, shocked back into remembrance of an old Connecticut oath. He all but ran to catch up to her, but she was furious with him, he saw. She was pale under her deep tan, and in the one glance she gave him her eyes were dark with scorn.

Then, though, they were beside the car. The chauffeur was out, held the rear door open, and from it emerged the man described by her as her uncle. That man offered a grin which encompassed both the girl and Wingate. "So you," he said most pleasantly to Wingate, "have decided to join us, eh?"

"*Mon oncle—*" the girl said, speaking French for the first time in Wingate's presence, and then the language was too fast for him to catch.

"You must excuse us," the heavy man told Wingate. "Our family habit is still to speak our native tongue, although during the war we all learned to talk the English well. My niece, as you would say it, is a bit haywire."

"Not haywire," Aurélienne Varois firmly said. "Damned angry. Be so good as to tell the big clown we want no part of him."

The heavy man bowed, this time in expression of regret. "Please excuse her," he said. "I'm not at all sure that she understands some of your country's slang. But let me present myself. I'm Monsieur Louis Beaujean. In the past, I've had numerous connections with the shipping company you just left. It's correct that you've left?"

"Very correct," Wingate said.

"Is it also true," Monsieur Beaujean said, "that you served your last vessel as navigator?"

Wingate nodded. He was watching the gray eyes, from which the darkness of wrath had begun to recede. He only half heard Monsieur Beaujean say: "Then I think we three should drive to my home and have a bottle of wine and some supper. There's business we can do together, Mr. —"

"Timothy Wingate," Wingate said. "But I don't think Mademoiselle Varois has got any use for me."

"You'd be surprised, Butch," she said, and brushed his shoulder, entering the car past him.

"By Godfrey," he said in all honesty, "I am."

The car, turning from the Boulevard d'Amada, began to climb a hill between the white walls of villas where bougainvillea and hibiscus grew. "Darlan was kept in a house near here," Wingate said in sudden recollection.

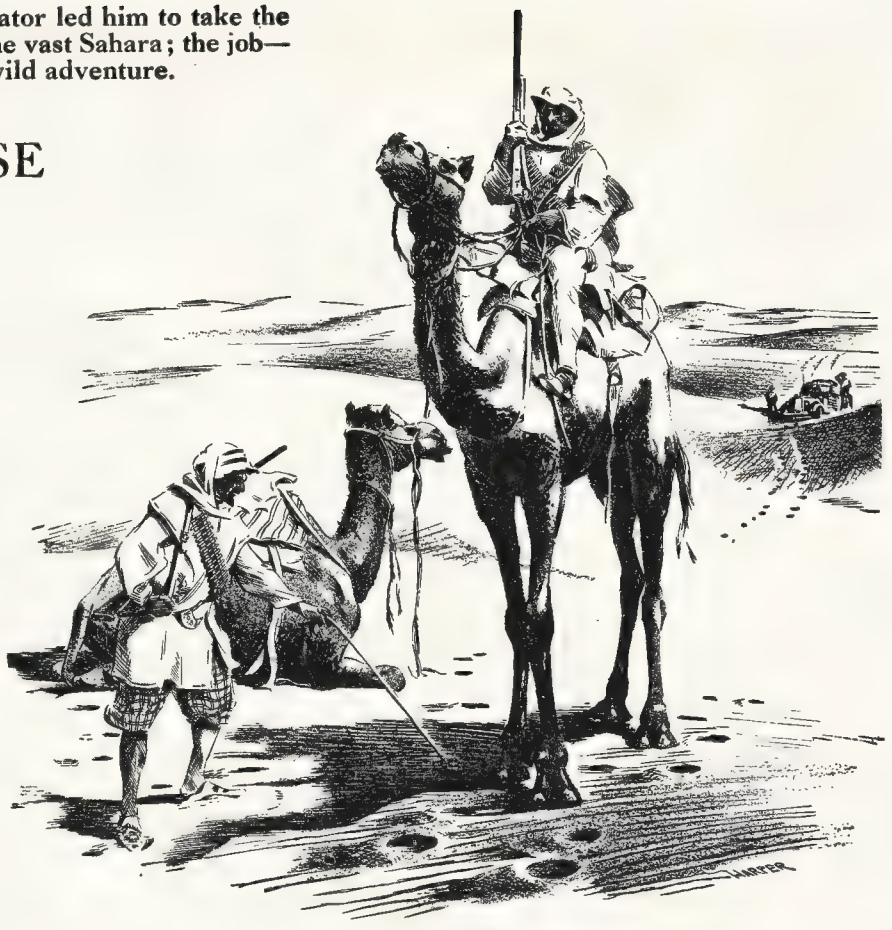
"True," Monsieur Beaujean said. "You have a good eye for your surroundings. Beyond here, also, is where your President, Roosevelt, met with Winston Churchill. History passes fast, eh?"

"Sure," Wingate said, but he was beginning to wonder just what Beaujean wanted of him.

BEFORE a very large villa the car stopped. Led by a servant in a jade-green jacket and floppy scare-Mohammed trousers, they went through an iron-bound gate. Fountains flung murmurous silver jets into the air in the courtyards banked with tall evergreens and palms. The hallway they followed was tiled with beautiful mosaics, intricately designed in full Moorish style. In the huge room where they seated themselves were wall-hangings and furniture which Wingate knew to be of extreme value. He felt abruptly ill at ease, aware of his rum-

His wartime training as a navigator led him to take the job of locating a remote spot in the vast Sahara; the job—and the girl—led to a wild adventure.

by ROBERT CARSE



pled khakis and unshaven chin. He went to the window and stood with his back to the room.

A lavender haze of dusk was spreading over the sea far beneath him. The waves broke in a faint white roil, and across them the great golden wing of El Hank light swept. He shook his head and swung around into the room, took the chair he had left.

"There's no doubt about your being a sailor," Monsieur Beaujean said. "Sight of the sea has its effect on you."

"But this man, he hates the sea," Aurélienne Varois said. "It is the reason for his trouble."

Wingate was making a definite effort at self-control. He forced his lanky body to relax, and his voice was calm as he said to her: "You seem to know a fair amount about me."

"Nobody who was at the Cintra last night could help hearing what you told your shipmates," she said. "Then today, in that place where you ended up, you told me a great deal more."

Monsieur Beaujean released a sigh which he meant as a sign of discretion. "I suggest that I order supper," he said. "Then we can get to our business."

"Start talking business right away if you want," Wingate said. "I don't know how long I'm going to stay." He disregarded the girl to watch Monsieur Beaujean. He thought that he had figured out Beaujean. From the man's manner, it was obvious that he wasn't one to waste time or effort.

"Excellent, excellent," commented Monsieur Beaujean. Then, leaning a bit forward: "Just what was your reason in leaving your ship?"

Wingate had the impulse to laugh. "You sound like the American consul," he said. "But your niece has already given you the right answer—I hate the sea."

"Don't think I'm being impertinent," Monsieur Beaujean said. "I have reason for asking. You see, it so happens that my niece and I have need for a navigator, a competent man who knows his work most thoroughly."

"I sailed navigator for almost three years," Wingate said. "Here." He flipped onto the table a canvas-covered case taken from the rear pocket of his trousers. "My license, my passport, some discharges and a couple of letters of recommendation. I was sober when I left the ship."

Monsieur Beaujean examined each document with care. He made a small satisfied sound as he put them back in the case and returned them to Wingate. "Excellent, excellent," he said again. "Now let me order supper."

"No," Wingate said. "Let's hear your proposition."

"It's really very simple," Monsieur Beaujean said. "We need you for a most specific job. That is to go into the Sahara Desert to try and find my nephew, Mademoiselle Varois' brother. He was lost there six years ago while with the Dornano column of Free French striking at Murzuq in Italian Libya. To find him will be both difficult and dangerous. But you'll be well paid."

WINGATE said slowly, to keep the excitement out of his voice, "How well?"

Monsieur Beaujean went to a cabinet in the corner of the room. When he came back, he placed a lacquered box in Wingate's hands. "Count what is inside," he said.

Wingate opened it and counted. It held fifty one-hundred-dollar American bills. "If we're successful and find Pierre Varois," Monsieur Beaujean said, "you'll receive an equal amount on our return. A fair proposition?"

"Sure," Wingate said. His facial muscles were tight as he tried to smile. He closed the box and put it on the table so that he wouldn't see the money. "But I'm from Nutmeg stock—that's Connecticut—and we don't believe in working for a man unless he understands just who we are."

Aurélienne said: "Have no worry about what happened last night or today. We know that once in a while sailors, they get cockeyed."

"Still, I can tell," Wingate went on, "that you're both wondering why I left my ship. You're not really certain about me. Well, the answer is, I never wanted to go to sea in the first place. Not that it isn't a good profession, and a lot of folks of mine were in it, whalers and like that. But I want to be a naval architect. I want to build 'em; and the men who like deep-water, they can sail 'em. Sure, I went to sea, but only so I could learn about ships. Then in the war it was different. I got my license and shipped out as a mate. It was hard, but it was a war, and we all had to fight in it.

"At the end of it, though, I thought: 'Gosh, now I can go home. I can get money from the Government and go to school and start to build my boats.' Boats first, see, then ships. . . . But I couldn't get any money from the Government for school. There was some sort of foul-up down in Washington about paying it. All I could find around Mystic—that's my home town—was work as a carpenter or apprentice boatwright. They didn't pay a man enough to go through college. So I came back to sea, only for the money."

He stopped and for an instant watched Aurélienne's steady eyes. "Shall I tell you the rest of it?"

"Now that you've started," she said.

"The ship that I got came here. It was just too damn' much for me. I thought of all the stuff that should have been, and I said I was through with it. If I couldn't have what I wanted, even a small part of it, then I wasn't going to take something I didn't like at all. So I hit the beach. . . . You were talking about my being a navigator. Well, I can figure out any position in the world for you. But where I'm going, except back to sea, I don't know."

"We're grateful to you," Monsieur Beaujean said, "for your honesty. Now shall we go to supper?"

"Yes," Aurélienne said. "I have hunger like that of a horse You too, Mr. Wingate?"

"Call me Tim," he said happily.

THEY sat in the huge room for a time after supper and Wingate asked Monsieur Beaujean: "Just how are we going to get into the desert, and out again?"

"I have my own plane," Beaujean said; "a two-motored Breguet I've recently been able to acquire. It will fly us to a spot in southern Algeria. We will be met by a specially equipped car and our guides. Using the car, we'll attempt to cross the Sahara."

"What's our objective?"

Monsieur Beaujean grimaced. "It is hard to say, eh, Aurélienne?"

'Yes," she said, motionless in her corner of the brocaded divan. "But you explain it, *mon oncle.* For such a thing, my English is shaky."

"We're looking for a place called *Bidon Sept*—Canteen Seven," Beaujean said. "It is a cache of water and oil and gasoline which was established for the use of Colonel Dornano's column. It's somewhere just south of the Libyan frontier in French territory. My nephew was in command of a group sent out by Colonel Dornano to get supplies from it. He never returned; nor did any members of his group. From the report brought back to Colonel Dornano by his scouts, the signs were that the group had fought a running skirmish against Senussi natives. All of the bodies were found but Pierre's. He had disappeared. There was no time to look farther. The column had to move on. Then, in the assault upon Murzuq, Colonel Dornano was killed. It was impossible afterward to use troops to search for Pierre."

'I'm not one to argue," Wingate said, "because I don't know enough. But it looks to me as if you're taking quite a chance to go after a man who's been missing for six years."

"I have connections in the desert," Monsieur Beaujean said in his easy voice. "From time to time I've traded with some of the clans and tribes—Korans and religious ornaments and cotton goods for what they have to sell. There have been repeated rumors that Pierre is still alive. He's supposed to be a captive of the Senussi in the region of Canteen Seven. We would have made the trip before if I had been able to get a plane. Also, the Government has been reluctant about allowing civilians to go in there."

"It's my guess," Wingate said bluntly, "that you haven't got permission to go in there at all." He was aware that before supper he had said a lot more about himself than he should, and trusted these people far too much. "In your pub'-crawling," he said to Aurélienne, "how many other guys have you told 'I want to be your friend, and help you'?"

"Oh, such a man!" Aurélienne said, her eyes flashing. "Why do we bother with him? Any other would be better than this *moufle.*"

Monsieur Beaujean made a little gesture to her which meant silence. "We have been looking for the right man for months," he told Wingate. "It's been our belief that an American or English navigating officer from one of the vessels in the port would best serve our purposes."

"So you picked me," Wingate said. "You figured a Frenchman might turn you in to the authorities, but a foreigner wouldn't mind so much about breaking military regulations."

"Precisely," Monsieur Beaujean said. "But you see, you're most suitable to us, because by your own admission you want to leave the sea. For any other man, it would be an interruption of his professional career. In your case, though, it will aid you. If I'm wrong in what I say, you can return to me the money I have advanced you and leave at once. We must have with us in the desert a man who is friendly and who trusts us. You wish to give back the money?"

"No," Wingate said after a moment of intense thought. "I'll hang on. I'll take the gamble and go with you."

"Then allow me to show you to your room," Monsieur Beaujean said. "We can discuss the rest of the details tomorrow in the plane."

Wingate looked around toward Aurélienne. But she had gone to stand by the window and stare forth into the courtyard. She was angry with him and had a right to be, Wingate thought as he went after Monsieur Beaujean up the curving marble staircase. The girl had her own pride, and he'd certainly kicked it around.

Inside the door of the big bedroom, Monsieur Beaujean said, "My niece and I understand your attitude. What we're attempting often seems most difficult to her and to me. Now, good night."

Wingate turned out the light as soon as he was between the smooth sheets of the canopied bed. He lay on his back and smoked a last cigarette and watched the moonlight play across the ceiling through the tall window. From the *medina* quarter came the high, thin and weird piping of a native flute, the rattle of a rapidly palmed drum; and the sounds excited him, took away the inclination to sleep.

There was a small balcony beyond the window, and he was tempted to go and stand on it, watch the night and the city. But he was still bruised inside from the brandy. He knew that all the wits he owned would be needed on this strange and tricky job. There were angles to it he didn't get yet, and some sort of hidden friction, a constant, veiled tension between Aurélienne and Beaujean. Everything made it look like a really rugged deal.

Five thousand dollars was fine, he told himself, and five thousand more would set him up fine in all he wanted back home. But the stuff wouldn't be worth much if he didn't live to get there. He stamped out the cigarette in the ash-tray, turned on his side and closed his eyes. . . . He was just about asleep when he heard the faint little click of the latch, the scrape of wood.

The sounds came from the next room, he realized at once. The window was being opened, and somebody was stepping out onto the balcony there. Well, it was none of his affair. He hunched the covers higher over his shoulder, took a tighter grip on the sheaf of fifty one-hundred-dollar bills under the pillow. But then he heard the voices: Aurélienne's and some man's in answer from the courtyard below.

WINGATE rose and went to his window. The moon was hidden by clouds, yet he could see Aurélienne. She was dressed in a long, stiff-folded negligée. Her hair hung loose about her shoulders as she leaned out over the balcony rail. The man with whom she talked in low, soft tones stood within the shadows of the evergreens in the courtyard. Wingate couldn't see him, only marked his presence by the sound of the voice. But then in reply to something Aurélienne said in rapid French, the man came forward a bit, and in the same instant the cloud went from the moon.

Wingate briefly saw the powerful body, the intelligent, tanned face. The man was young, and his French was as fast and incomprehensible to Wingate as that Aurélienne spoke. It was her boy-friend, Wingate thought with an odd sensation of jealousy. The lad had slipped over her uncle's wall to say good-by to Aurélienne before she shoved off for the desert. Maybe in a couple of minutes, through a little balcony climbing, there'd be a nice

love-scene. Wingate resolutely turned and went back to bed.

He had slid far enough into sleep to imagine Aurélienne being kissed by him when the door to his room opened. He sat up, nervous and angry and confused. The moonlight had all but gone; still it touched the big figure and the blued-steel pistol. "Hey, what are you doing?" Wingate said, and swung upright.

"Quiet!" It was Monsieur Beaujean, and he held the pistol waist-high in his right hand. He pivoted as Wingate came toward him. "Quiet," he said again—then hit Wingate on the chin.

The blow was an uppercut that took Wingate back across the bed. He lay there stunned and struggling for his senses for several seconds. Then he raised, and saw that Beaujean crouched at the window, the pistol-barrel braced across his left wrist for better aim. But Beaujean didn't fire. There was no further sound of Aurélienne's voice or that of the man who'd been in the courtyard. The sounds were the *medina* fife, the drum-rapping and the faint, fine rustle of the evergreens in the night breeze.

Wingate stretched himself. He felt his jaw and the lump already on it. Beaujean was his boss; Beaujean was a big man. But to sock you like that, five thousand dollars and the promise of another five wasn't a fair price. The only way to make it fair was to sock Beaujean back. He set his feet and his body, brought his hands up and out before him. "Put down the gun, Mister," he said. "Then try the uppercut again."

Beaujean walked past him as if he hadn't heard. He went and turned on the bed lamp, then sat down on the edge of the bed and lit a cigarette. "You're a young man, Wingate," he said; "young and impetuous. If you weren't, you wouldn't be here. You have been in a war, and you have seen a lot of things which you think have given you a hardness of spirit and a disregard of danger. But now you must be calm, and you must listen to me. Did you, before I came in, hear anybody outside the window?"

"No," Wingate said.

"Did you see anybody outside?"

"No." Wingate wasn't angry any more. His confusion and nervousness had left him, and his one definite thought was that he no longer had any liking for this Beaujean. He made no attempt to figure out why he lied to Beaujean beyond realizing that it was part of his new dislike for the man. He walked deliberately around to where Beaujean sat, picked a cigarette from the bedside box and lit it. He said: "What were you trying to prove with that gun?"

"Our trip is to be secret," Monsieur Beaujean said with obvious patience.

"I'm not trying to be rude," Wingate said, "but aren't you mistaken?"

"If the authorities found out about it, I might most possibly lose the privileges I've long enjoyed in the desert. Business rivals would take my trade away from me like that." Beaujean made a snapping sound with his fingers to indicate the speed of his loss. Then, with a practiced motion, he slid the automatic into a shoulder-holster worn under his coat. "You must understand these things. This is Africa, not the deck of some American freighter, or Mystic, Connecticut. It was my distinct impression, before, that somebody, some man who might have been a spy, was in the courtyard."

Wingate made a negative motion with his head. "Not that I know about," he said.

"I'm sorry that I had to hit you," Beaujean said. "I did it because I believed you should be quiet. Accept my apologies, will you?"

"Sure."

"I notice that you keep your money under the pillow. My servants are honest. But in the morning I'll see that when new clothes are brought to you, you'll get a money-belt. Sleep well. A little cold water on a towel will help your jaw if it hurts you."

"Thanks," Wingate said. "And good night."

He slept after that, most soundly and in absolute exhaustion. The next thing he remembered was the servant knocking on the door and entering in the sunlight. Then he put on the new clothes and the money-belt with the money buttoned tight inside it. Both Aurélienne and Monsieur Beaujean seemed gay and excited at breakfast, but he couldn't at all tell from Aurélienne's expression what she knew about last night. It would have to wait until later, he decided. If he was really honest with himself, he wasn't any more sure about Aurélienne than he was about Beaujean.

As they drove through the city and out to the airport, the day glittered with sun. The airport officials greeted Beaujean with open respect, wished him the best of flying. "My secretary, a young man I'm taking with me," Beaujean said, and waved his hand at Wingate. "I have his papers all in order for the people at Gibraltar." Then they climbed into the plane, and the pilot opened his motors, ran the strip and they were in the air.

The pilot headed north and east, took an altitude which made them in the fuselage shiver from the cold. But

he was beginning to turn, and Wingate saw Casablanca as a pastel blur against the blue Atlantic crest under the starboard wing-tip. Right beneath was the last of the coastal plane, and ahead were the ragged purple peaks of the Atlas Mountains. That meant the course had been changed to almost due south. They were bound for the Sahara.

THE air was bumpy over the mountains. The plane dipped, rocked, dropped and climbed unevenly. They were for a great part of the time in cumulus cloud, thick and vast, and only occasionally could they see the mountains. Shadow was reaching across the precipitous valleys, blanking out the knife-keen ridges.

Aurélienne wrapped herself in a blanket and lit a cigarette. But Monsieur Beaujean got up and opened thermos containers full of hot chicken soup and buttered biscuit. He passed the food to them silently, then went to relieve the pilot while the pilot ate.

Wingate recognized the pilot right away. He was the man who had been in the courtyard. There was no mistaking the set of the shoulders, or the face. But he did no more than nod quickly to Wingate before he sat down beside Aurélienne and began to eat. He exchanged a few sentences with her, and although Wingate listened and watched, he could find no evidence of their being lovers.

That made him feel better, and he sat back and gave himself to consideration of how Beaujean flew the plane. Beaujean was more skillful at the controls than the pilot. He sent the plane into higher altitude, out from the cloud and rough air. "The man must think that there's no longer any chance of our being seen by another plane," Wingate told himself. "We're getting farther out into the desert all the time, where there won't be any planes or even a military post." But the pilot was getting up to go back to the controls, and Wingate took the opportunity to say to Aurélienne: "Did everything go all right for you last night?"

"You act the fool," she said softly, "ever to try to talk to me alone. My uncle is most aware of everything that goes on. Please, for yourself and me, no. You make trouble in such a way."

Wingate wanted to curse. He wanted to take Aurélienne by the shoulders and shake her. "I stopped your boy-friend from being shot," he said. "I got banged in the jaw for doing it, but I didn't mind if I could help a bit."

"I'm very sorry that your jaw got banged," Aurélienne said. "But I have no boy-friend, and you helped nothing by whatever you did."

"All right," Wingate said. "Have it your way."

Monsieur Beaujean was coming back from the controls. He told them to put on their safety belts. "We're going to land in a few minutes," he said.

The mountains were far in back of them to the north, Wingate saw. In the final splendor of daylight they were winging low over desolate, open country. Outcroppings of sandstone that shimmered with mica shale rose from the wind-fretted dunes. There were rare little patches of scrubby brush, a faint flicker of green where a few blades of grass grew. But all the rest was the tremendous expanse of sand, the desert that ran south, east and west for more than a thousand miles.

He closed his safety belt and pulled it tight. The pilot was coming around in a banking turn to land. Below in a level space between two ridges were white strips of cloth spread on the ground. Off to one side, all but hidden under a boulder overhang, was the dun shape of a car and the angular forms of a pair of kneeling, tethered camels.

The pilot slowed, then cut his motors. There was the first slight shock, then the heavy jounce and sway of landing. The plane veered from side to side, the wheels roughly skidding upon the sand, but it stopped, was still, and Wingate could hear the sound of his own breathing, the crackle of oil in the hot motors.

Monsieur Beaujean was at the door, unlocked and opened it. As he poised to jump down onto the sand Wingate noticed that Beaujean was without his coat, but still wore the pistol. The two men in turbans and faded blue knee-length robes who advanced from the car carried rifles in their hands. This, Wingate decided, was where the fun started. But Aurélienne was pushing him from behind and asked: "For what do you wait?"

"My scimitar and my dancing girls," he said, then leaped down before her.

Monsieur Beaujean was already at the car, carefully examining the broad, special tires, the water and oil and gasoline containers, the lockers stocked with tinned food. Beside him stood the two desert men, motionless and wordless, and Wingate watched them with sharp interest.

One was quite small, stooped by what seemed to be an old wound that had misshapen his right leg. Both he and the taller man wore cheap cotton veils. The dye from the veils had long since given their beards a dirty, off-shade tinge. Their sinewed arms and legs were the same color as their rifle stocks. Their hair was long, fastened with strips of leather decorated with small, dry and hard amulets. Across their chests were bandoleers chafed by years of wear. Their rifles were lever-action Winchesters, not at all new but very well kept, with fine tracings and notches around the butt plates. They smelled of sweat, of camels and of rancid goat-butter. Probably neither of them, Wingate thought, had ever been near enough water to take a bath if that idea had come to them. Their eyes were unblinking.

He looked aside at Aurélienne, feeling uneasy under that joint unchanging gaze.

"Where did your uncle meet such high-toned people?"

"They're R'Gueibat," she said, "men from a famous nomad tribe. They know all of the desert, are expert guides."

"Let's call the big one Ho and the smaller one Hum. Maybe, when we need a laugh, we can laugh at that."

"You're not very funny," she said. "And why don't you help the pilot get the extra gasoline tins out of the plane?"

But then Monsieur Beaujean looked up from under the canvas hood over the body of the car. "Here's your navigation equipment," he called to Wingate. "You'd better examine it."

The sextant he was to use, Wingate found, was a superb United States Army Air Corps model of the artificial horizon type. There was a chronometer built into the grip; and the arc, the telescope and the shade glasses were in perfect condition. Next to the sextant case in the car was a small folding table for his plotting work, and in a drawer beneath were an Air Almanac, also of Air Corps issue, several pairs of dividers and parallel rulers, the right sort of pencils, and a number of plotting sheets and fine-scale charts. In another drawer were two portable compasses that checked, an aneroid barometer and a set of azimuth tables. He was amazed once more at the care and expensive detail of Monsieur Beaujean's planning. Whoever Pierre Varois was besides being a former officer of the Free French forces, Beaujean and Aurélienne certainly had a great affection for him.

Wingate was sharply reminded that here was something very strange about all this. It didn't make sense that a man of Beaujean's obvious wealth and position should risk his own life in the desert to find his nephew. Aurélienne didn't belong here either, and why had she refused to talk to him about what had happened last night?

If there was fact in the native rumors that Beaujean had mentioned, then Pierre Varois, as an officer who had rendered his country valiant service, should be searched for by a Regular Army force sent out from the nearest post under direct orders to bring him back or learn his fate. Maybe Pierre had died six years ago in that skirmish around Canteen Seven. Maybe Pierre had never existed at all,

nor had Canteen Seven, and they were being used as parts of a trick which would be of profit to Beaujean alone.

Wingate turned to talk with Monsieur Beaujean, anxiety as to his own future forgotten in the desire to know the truth. But Beaujean had walked over to the side of the plane. He was in very serious conversation with the pilot. The broad-shouldered young pilot was gesticulating, speaking with emphasis. Plainly, there was disagreement between him and Beaujean.

The two R'Gueibat were moving over step by step. They stood not far from Monsieur Beaujean and behind him. Their rifles were still held in the crooks of their arms, but there was a definite tension in the way their gaunt, shaggy heads were cocked to follow the conversation.

"WHAT'S going on?" Wingate asked Aurélienne. She was at the rear of the car, busy with a can-opener and a small gasoline stove.

"The pilot doesn't want to go back tonight," she said. "Uncle Louis insists that he should. He wants the plane to be back in Casablanca tomorrow so that there won't be any suspicion of where we are. Out here, too, a military patrol plane might see our plane at any time."

"But it's getting dark," Wingate said. "To take off now is a risky job."

"Uncle Louis knows that," she said with nervous sharpness. "There are ground-flares. Everything is provided for. Please, you must remember that my uncle is in charge."

"I'd have a tough time forgetting it," Wingate said, then fell silent. The pilot was getting into the plane, starting the motors. Out on the flat beyond, the R'Gueibat were placing rows of flares, their robes rucked around their knees as they ran through the blue-black darkness.

The plane motors gathered from a monotone into a furious beating roar. The plane swung and gathered speed between the flares. Wingate watched the wheels, waiting for them to leave the ground. But they didn't leave the ground. They went sidewise and lopped crazily, kicked in upon themselves, smashed. He looked up, yelling in horror a wild warning, although he already knew it was too late.

One wing-tip, the port, was dragging the ground as the plane looped over the sand. Bits of fabric were pulling away; now the propeller flailed and whined off in ragged fragments. In the flare-cast space where it floundered, the plane appeared like some vast bird born of nightmare. The starboard propeller was still turning. It swung the plane around, around and over upon the wreck of the port wing.

The pilot jumped. He landed on his hands and knees. He was like that, just starting to come upright, when the gasoline tanks exploded. The pilot became a shrieking torch, dancing several grotesque steps away from the plane while he died. . . .

The pilot became a shrieking torch, dancing several grotesque steps while he died.

Timothy Wingate had reached him before then, knocked him to the sand. He rolled the body over and over. But it was too late. The shock of agony had caught the heart. "All right, kid," Wingate said, as if the man could still hear him. "You're all right now."

He was able to look at what had been the pilot. The old lock of self-control learned in the war grasped him, and he was quiet within himself, kept the hysteria down. But he suddenly heard and saw the camels. Frightened by the flames and by the cries of agony, they had broken loose from their tethers. They went galloping in utter, stupid terror straight down the path of flares past the plane. Their eyes showed blank but brightly glaring. Their yellow teeth gleamed. Their long legs formed a frieze of motion, and upon the sand their hoofs slammed a catenation of frenzy. They screamed as they ran; it was worse than the sound of the man's dying.

Wingate let himself go in cursing the camels. Then he cursed Monsieur Beaujean. He strode to Beaujean and looked into his face. "You told him to take off," he said. "If you hadn't forced him, he'd still be alive."

"Go away. Shut up," Monsieur Beaujean said. His eyes were all but closed. A white line was along his upper lip, and the nostrils of his nose flared. When he saw that Wingate still stood in front of him, he began to take out the pistol from the holster. But Aurélienne led Wingate away. She clasped him gently by the arm

Ho's hand was gradually sliding back toward the trigger.

and brought him over to the car. She said, "Sit down. I'm going to get some salve to put on your hands."

"Don't bother with me," Wingate said he was gasping as though he had run a long distance. "I'm O.K."

But she put salve and a light bandage on his hands. She sat beside him, and her shoulder was against his, and she talked. He had the shivers, his teeth rattled with them. He didn't know what she talked about, but the pressure of her shoulder, the tone of her voice were pleasant to him. He got so he no longer saw the old bad images in his head, and was even able to get away from the image of the pilot lying there.

The camels were being led back. The R'Gueibat had them. The fire of the plane was down. Only the motors lay cherry-red, sending an effulgence into the sky. Monsieur Beaujean covered the glowing steel with sand. Then he took care of the pilot.

Wingate noticed those things. He marked them all in his memory. "Would you like something to eat?" Aurelienne asked beside him after a time. "No," he told her. "I'd just like to sleep, I think." He went to sleep sitting there like that.

When he awoke, it was his hands that bothered him. He found that he had been stretched out, and that several blankets were over him. He'd been pulling at the blankets, and it hurt his hands. He lay and looked up at the stars and the moon where it began to swerve low in the east. The night was so cold he could see his breath, and he heard the rustle of snakes, the champing and snuffle of the camels where they knelt at their tethers.

He was going to be awake all night, he knew. Sleep wasn't going to come back to him. He turned his head to see where the others were. Aurélienne and Monsieur Beaujean had sleeping-bags. Aurélienne was in the rear of car, Beaujean down under it. The smaller R'Gueibat, the one he had dubbed Hum, lay wrapped in his cloak not more than five yards from him. The man's Winchester was clasped in his arms; he would come to consciousness the second anybody touched it. But the other one, the taller fellow, Ho, was up on the ridge to the north. He sat erect, his rifle on his knees. He was the lookout; he had the night watch, and sat and waited for anything that might mean trouble.

Well, Wingate told himself, he was going to make trouble. If he didn't do it now, he never would, but he'd find out how the pilot died. Not the burning, but how the plane had ground-looped. Monsieur Beaujean had forced the pilot to take off. The way Wingate reckoned it, Beaujean hadn't wanted the plane here, but neither had he wanted it back at Casablanca.

Wingate didn't get to his feet. He slid out from under the blankets and went hunkering on his knees and elbows over the sand. He watched Ho on the ridge and he looked behind him. But nobody bothered him yet.

HE stopped when he got to the wreckage of the plane. He remembered how the tires had flopped and gone buckling inward. The two R'Gueibat had been about opposite here then; they'd had their rifles with them. With clumsy motions of his inflamed hands he pawed through the wreckage. It hurt him quite a good deal and he nearly cried out several times, but he found what he wanted. The rim of the starboard wheel carried a jagged mark made by a rifle-bullet. Other bullets, of course, must have gone through the tires themselves.

He recollected just how the plane had moved along the path between the flares. He took a cross-bearing at right angles to the wreckage. Then he crawled over to the ridge of rock a hundred yards or so away. The macerated bullets were there, stopped and flattened by the rock. They glinted a bit in the moonlight, and he picked up a half dozen of them, put them in his pocket. When he looked up, he saw Ho above him on the ridge.

He felt sheer anger at sight of the R'Gueibat. This man and his companion were murderers. At the orders of Beaujean they'd fired into the tires of the plane, forced it to ground-loop and burn. Now Ho was making up his mind whether or not he should kill Wingate. The man lay with his rifle held in one hand, the other gradually sliding back toward the trigger. He made no attempt to hide himself or his action from Wingate; he was completely aware of what Wingate knew about him.

There was a chunk of stone in front of Wingate. It was perhaps three inches long and four wide, weighed a couple of pounds. Wingate picked it up, and as he picked it up, he stood. He forgot the pain that ran from his hand along his arm to all his body. He threw the stone at Ho with every bit of strength he possessed.

He hadn't aimed for the head, but for the right shoulder, and that was where it struck. Ho let a muttering grunt out of him as the shoulder-bone cracked. His rifle slipped and slid halfway down the ridge. He started after it, running as he came, but Wingate did not bother to look back at him. The man wasn't going to shoot him now, not with a broken collarbone and not with Aurélienne and Monsieur Beaujean awake and watching.

Monsieur Beaujean rolled out from under the car, drew himself from his sleeping-bag. "You shouldn't have been out there," Beaujean told him. "That man and the other have orders to shoot anybody who moves from the immediate circle of the camp at night."

"It's too bad the word wasn't passed on to me," Wingate said. "If I hadn't chunked a rock at him, he might have shot me."

Monsieur Beaujean said some words which sounded to Wingate like French curses. "The desert is dangerous," he said. "You shouldn't take such chances, Wingate."

"I know it," Wingate said. "You'd better give me a gun so I can protect myself." He pawed out the bullets, held them on his puffed and bleeding hand. "One, maybe, that's the same caliber as these."

Monsieur Beaujean said nothing. He turned and picked up his sleeping-bag, went back under the car. But Aurélienne got down and came to Wingate. "Let me see your hand," she said, stooping. "It's very bad," she went on, her voice almost breaking. "I can't understand how it got this way."

"I can," Wingate said. For the first time he recognized that he wanted to hold her in his arms and kiss her. "But it'll take care of itself. You go back and get your sleep. I'm going to sit here while Ho turns over the watch to Hum."

THERE were times when Wingate felt that he had never known anything except the desert. His whole being was immersed in it, as though he had been plunged to the bottom of a boundless and hitherto unimagined ocean. His work was his one direct link with the past. He performed it with the utmost skill, not only because he took pride in doing it well but also because he knew that if his navigation failed they would quite certainly die out here from slow and awful thirst.

The place where the plane had landed them was named El Mengoub on the charts. Little crawling lines which were supposed to be camel-trails were marked as leading away from it. But in the desert those trails didn't any longer exist. Sandstorms raised by the all-but-incessant winds had obliterated them. Also, where camels might have gone the car could not pass in safety. The R'Gueibat were soon worthless as guides. Day by day, they became more and more dependent on Wingate for the course to follow. But they still had their value in the fact that they were able to distinguish from the contour and appearance of the immediate terrain the hidden sand-traps, the false ground where the car would instantly break an axle or careen down a slope strewn with boulders.

Wingate was forced to work closely with the R'Gueibat and Monsieur Beaujean. He had no liking for any of them, and realized that they in turn hated him. But here, confronted by the Sahara, it was tacitly understood that such things be disregarded. Every morning at dawn after Wingate fixed the position by his star sights they held a conference. Beaujean had considerable desert knowledge of his own. From him and the two nomads Wingate gathered a steadily growing fund of information.

This was the great *Erg Chech*, the Veiled Desert, which they now crossed. It was an expanse where dunes met dunes in fantastic form and complexity of pattern. Wind and the sand had made a maze through which they almost blindly sought their way. Often it was impossible to see farther ahead than from one dune crest to the next. Always the sun hammered them; their heads and eyes ached from it, and their bodies were clasped by a weight of heat which demanded a conscious effort of the will for each movement.

Out ahead the R'Gueibat rode, the camels slowly shambling. The two men hunched crosslegged, seated on the goatskin bags that served them as saddles. Little brown swallows perched on the scrawny hindquarters of the camels, only occasionally disturbed by a tail flick or a lurching stride. Under the broad hoofs the sand spurted and the shale turned in quick glimmers of light. The riders dismounted and the sun's retraction distorted them to the size of giants. They prodded the ground on each side of them with their camel sticks, then swung to signal the car.

Aurélienne drove the car. Monsieur Beaujean and Wingate stood at the forward fenders. Aurélienne eased the car into extra-low first gear, started it in motion and they walked alongside, ready to push the moment the wheels lost traction in a caving pocket of sand. It was cruelly hard work, for the metal of the car was blistering hot when they pushed, and yet they gloried in it. A kind of unexpressed but fierce rivalry had developed between them. They strained with all their force because Aurélienne was there to appreciate each man's strength and endurance. In the few hours a day when they could ride, they stood opposite each other on the running-boards, silent, watching her.

Near noon every day Beaujean, as the head of the party, called a halt. Then they sat in what shade the hood of the car gave and the sweat slipped pattering from them and the camels groaned, snapped at each other and the flies. Not even the R'Gueibat could sleep. The heat was too pervasive, too dominant for that. A sort of stupor claimed them and in this the hours passed until late afternoon.

As the sun lowered they moved ahead again. But first Beaujean put on the head-phones of the radio set, listened carefully with a code book propped up in front of him. What the man wanted, Wingate knew, was the location of every French patrol in the desert. He took down their orders, the various troop movements and dispositions, kept a list of them locked in a compartment with the code book.

But Wingate was able from time to time to take his thought from Beaujean. He let himself relax in the beauty of the desert. In late afternoon the mirages usually appeared to cross and recross the sky in a panoply of magnificence far beyond imagination. Towers gleamed, and minarets, walls which were ivory and rose and lapis lazuli. Lakes appeared; palm fronds were reflected in them, and to gaze into the depths was to remember coolness for a moment.

SOON afterward darkness fell. It came striking down the sky like a sword-blade. The stars and the planets broke clear and Wingate stood with his sextant, calling off his readings and his time to Aurélienne where she rested at the plotting-table. She helped him with his navigation, expressed great interest in the work. "But we're slow," he told her one evening when he had established the position. "We're only making an average of about a hundred miles a day. It will be weeks before we're anywhere near Canteen Seven."

"That is all right," she said. "We have enough of food, of oil and gasoline. Ho and Hum say they know of a well where in a few more days we can get water. Patience, it's a necessary thing in the desert."

"I guess," he said, looking at her, "it's necessary anywhere."

She wore the same sort of clothes as he and Monsieur Beaujean, khaki shorts and a shirt with the sleeves cut off just below the shoulders. She had picked up some place a long-billed American flyer's cap; and that with her heavy, high shoes, which were needed against the heat, gave her an oddly raffish air. But as she stooped in the radiance of the gasoline stove to cook supper or stood in the blue-white starshine she was lovely enough to take Wingate's breath away.

He sought her out and sat and talked with her after the simple meal was done. He told her of his father, who was a good guy, if a bit stuffy; of his mother, who'd been pretty as a picture when she was young; about the war; about Mystic and all the Connecticut shore; but more than anything else, about the vessels he was going to build.

She listened gravely, silent a good part of the time and telling only a few small facts about herself. She came

Illustrated by Arthur Harper

"Stop!" she said to Beaujean. "Get away! Believe me, I will shoot if you don't!"

from Dijon, he found, but when she was a youngster her family had moved to North Africa. Her father was an engineer who'd worked on the harbor installations in Casablanca and Oran and Bizerte, then on railroad and highway construction. "During the war I was in the resistance," she said. "We did our part, right under the noses of the Germans."

"But how about Pierre?" he said. "Tell me about your brother."

She was silent. She looked around to see where Monsieur Beaujean sat. "I keep my mind closed to thought of Pierre," she said. "I've promised myself not to speak of him or think of him until we reach Canteen Seven."

"I can understand why," Wingate said. Monsieur Beaujean was nearby, stretched out on his sleeping bag, but Wingate paid no attention to him. He took Aurélienne's hand and pressed it. "You've had a rugged time, and I want you to know that you have all my sympathy."

"Thank you, Tim," she said. But she was getting up, moving toward the rear of the car. "It's late. Let us say good night."

It was his sudden and strong temptation to hold her there, to ask her the question which had been pressing in his mind for days. He wanted to find out from her the exact relation between her and Beaujean, just how close Beaujean had been to her parents. Still it would be stupid of him to ask it now, he realized. She couldn't give him any kind of an open answer with Beaujean right there. So he moved aside and smiled and said: "Good night, Aurélienne."

On previous nights he had slept well as soon as the desert began to cool. But tonight he pitched from side to side in his sleeping-bag, thinking of home and the girls he had known. He had told Aurélienne about them pretty casually, because after all he'd never been in love. Now he gave himself to wondering if he might love any of them. He decided not. If he loved and married one of those girls from home, the whole pattern of his life would be set for him. It would be his father's and his mother's life all over again. There would be a white clapboard house with a couple of maples in front of it, a station-wagon, a job, one kid, another kid, then old age.

What kind of a job it was didn't matter much, because in Mystic he was never going to starve. His folks and his friends would take care of that, and after a while even his wife would think it kind of strange that he'd once had the idea he would like to be a naval architect. He and his wife would be secure; they'd have very little to worry about. Between them there couldn't be any secrets or mysteries. Folks in Mystic didn't hold onto anything secret for very long. It would be pleasant, smooth and easy, not at all like being in love with Aurélienne.

He laughed a bit and hugged his arms around his shoulders. Aurélienne tantalized him with what he didn't know about her, the things she refused to say and do. But she was the one he loved.

In the first keen feeling of that knowledge he swung his head around just so that he might look at her where she slept in the rear of the car. But her sleeping-bag was empty. She was not there. He sat up in alarm and then he saw her.

She was with Beaujean. They were walking side by side in the pooled starshine a couple of hundred yards past the car. The starshine and the phosphorescent glimmer of the sand clearly illuminated them. Wingate could make out that Beaujean was taking Aurélienne in his arms; he was trying to kiss her. The sound of the slap made a flat little sound; then there was the thud of Aurélienne's boots as she ran over the sand. Wingate lay back and waited.

He pulled himself quickly out of the bag when he heard Beaujean. He got up and met the man before the other had returned halfway to the car. Beaujean's attitude was the usual one of indifference; he attempted to walk past Wingate without a word, but Wingate stopped him. He took Beaujean by the arm and spun him around.

He said: "I haven't asked you right out why you had the pilot killed. I've got a good enough idea of my own. I'm not going to ask you, either, what you're up to out here, although I know it's something crooked. But I'm going to tell you to let Aurélienne be. You're not her uncle. You're just some lying smart guy who thinks he's tough."

Beaujean made a laughing sound. He said: "The only thing you've forgotten to ask me is to kill you. Do you want me to accommodate you right now?"

Wingate saw the thick hand upon the pistol grip, saw the pistol slide down to be held horizontal. He measured Beaujean, not only the way he stood and held the pistol, but everything he knew about the man. He hit with sharp speed, straight from the shoulder and following in behind the blow. His only danger, he thought in that second of impact, was that the shock might jar Beaujean's hand and set off the gun. But Beaujean wasn't going to shoot him of his own accord. Beaujean needed him too much. He was too necessary to the outfit, else nights ago Beaujean would have done the job—or had the R'Gueibat do it.

BEAUJEAN came erect with blood across his face. His eyes could hardly be seen under the lowered lids. But he put the pistol away. He wiped the blood from his face and made no move to strike back at Wingate.

"That's right," Wingate said. "You know I'm strong enough and fast enough to beat you stiff. Don't bother with me. Don't bother with Aurélienne. Take your time and wait until you've got whatever it is you're

after out here. Then square me away with a bullet in the back."

Beaujean brought himself to laugh again before he started for the car. "No," he said. "I'm going to see you take a walking trip. Thirst in the Sahara can be quite an experience."

IN the next few days they came out into what the charts described as the hammada country. It was slightly above sea-level, a rolling plateau corrugated with sandstone cliffs and littered by boulders but firm underfoot.

The car picked up and maintained an average speed of more than twenty miles an hour. Now they had to wait for the R'Gueibat camels to keep pace with the machine. The fodder for the animals was almost gone, as was the water supply, and several times a day Beaujean checked the position with Wingate.

Wingate didn't take the trouble to ask him; he knew from the deeply drawn lines in Beaujean's face and the way the two nomads constantly scouted the desert from side to side of the course that very soon they must discover water or die, all of them. Nervous fatigue had taken Aurélienne's strength. She was no longer capable of driving. She lopped on the seat head down, eyes shut, while Beaujean sent the car forward. Wingate had a tremendous desire to solace her, talk with her alone.

But always Beaujean was there, watchful, listening. Beaujean became for Wingate a violent obsession. Only the final residue of his self-control held him from leaping at the man, finishing it between them once and forever. He wasn't ready, he kept telling himself. He had to hang on until they were across the desert. Then— His hands and his whole body shook as he thought of how he would at last seek out Beaujean.

In the carmine outburst of one dawn they came upon the *runi* writing. Beaujean named it, running his fingers over the faint, fine and ancient characters once cut deep into the sandstone rock. "Nobody knows who made them or what they mean," he said hoarsely to Wingate. "But they mark a north-south route from the Sudan to Egypt. The people making the hadj, the holy pilgrimage to Mecca, used to follow it. Check this position on the chart."

Wingate was working at the chart, the dividers sweat-slippery in his fingers, when the R'Gueibat shouted. They had been out ahead, came back with their skinny animals jerking at the gallop. They called to Beaujean in their own tongue and he went forward with them. "What is it?" Wingate asked Aurélienne.

She moved over behind the wheel, started the motor. A flush of intense color was up behind her tan. Her voice was odd, harsh as she said: "They've found water. The *runi* writing marks the way to it."

"That's right." Beaujean had returned to the car without sound. He glanced sharply at Aurélienne. "I'll drive," he told her and took the wheel. He chose a path between the boulders, then down a slope where the springs racked whining under the strain. Where the car stopped was in what Wingate had learned to call a *feidj*. It was a narrow depression set between sprawled walls of sandstone. The sun made of it a caldron of liquid light. In that brilliance it was hard to see; heat seared the eyeballs with nearly unbearable pain.

But Beaujean sprang out and said to Wingate: "Bring the spade and follow me." He went ahead with rapid strides, and Wingate hurried after him.

The camels had smelled the water. They pawed and pounded the ground with their hoofs, spread their spatulate underlips snuffling down and then screamed in the excitement of their thirst. The R'Gueibat were forced to drive them back, tether them before the hole could be dug to clear the well.

It was under layers of sand and shale. As Wingate dug, he thought of the containers in the car. The water left in them was less than two gallons. With their own needs and what the camels drank and the motor took, that meant enough for only another day of travel. The next source of water marked on the charts was in the Ahaggar region, eight days' travel away.

His throat constricted and his palate seemed afire. He remembered back in Mystic when they were working to get in the hay and his grandmother came out to the field with the brown jug full of barley water. He could feel again the cool slickness of the jug in his hands, the sweet, flavored water in his mouth, the sweat drying on his back under the shade of the maple trees along the wall. Then he was at the house on an August afternoon and they'd been playing ball, when the pump was primed, the water came gushing fast, silver-spilling out over the lip and onto his bare feet before he could stoop and drink. It was colder than the water in Beeker's pond when they went swimming in the deep end near the old forge and the bullheads stung your shins.

"Stand back," Beaujean said. He and the R'Gueibat knelt, hauled at a flat slab of stone. They lifted it, and there far below in the walled well was the water. Hum had a small goathide bucket on a leather rope. Balancing himself carefully, he lowered the bucket down into the darkness. There was a rippling splash, a gurgle, and the rope was taut. Hum pulled away, his veined hands deft and certain on the rope.

The water had a sulphurous smell, but it was clean, clear and cool. Beaujean said, "Go to the car and get the containers and start filling them. Be sure you don't waste any."

"I'll be sure," Wingate said.

Aurélienne was stretched across the front seat of the car. She lay face-down, her head on her crossed arms, and her position was one of inert collapse. Wingate grasped her shoulder. He softly called her name. She made no response. She was, he saw, deep in unconsciousness.

He took one of the metal containers in each hand and went back to the well. He filled them without speaking to Beaujean or looking at him. His thought was centered completely upon Aurélienne.

He propped her up in the front seat after he brought the containers to the car. From her own private kit in her sleeping-bag he took a wash-cloth and a bottle of cologne. He bathed her brow and face, her wrists. She started to rouse out of her stupor, and he opened the top buttons of her shirt, ran the sopping cloth over her throat and neck.

She shivered; then her eyes were open and she was blinking and smiling at him. "I did what you call a pass-out," she murmured; "a tail-spin. I'm sorry."

"Don't be," he said. "Just take your cologne and smell some of it." He was bent down over her, and the temptation was too great. He kissed her cheek and then her lips. He was straightening up, just beginning to move back from her, when Beaujean struck him from behind.

WINGATE went to his knees with the blow. He covered his head with his arms, for Beaujean was still striking at him, cursing as he sent the blows. There was an insane kind of rage in his voice. "So you'd kiss her, you swine!" he said. "So you'd put your hands on her!"

Wingate went at him in a crouch, hitting upward. He knew with a cold, tight sensation along his spine that now Beaujean meant to kill him. But the other had hurt him so much that his own blows were weak and clumsy. Beaujean battered him with awful force, he knocked him almost prone and kicked him.

In a reeling sidewise motion Wingate got free and tried once more to stand and fight. But Aurélienne was down from the car. She was between him and Beaujean. She had a pistol, and Wingate saw that it was Beaujean's. Somehow she had got it from him. "Stop!" she said to Beaujean. "Get away! Believe me, I will shoot if you don't. We need this man. You have no reason to harm him."

Beaujean was panting so hard that it obscured the words. He took a

"Pierre," Aurélienne said. "Pierre, c'est moi." Varois halted, his cane dropped, the wound-ugly face became rigid.

step toward Wingate, and another, and then he stopped. His hands lowered to his sides. The glitter of insanity went from his eyes, and like a mask suddenly changed calmness came over his face. He said: "Give me back my pistol, Aurélienne."

"You understand me?" she said.

"Yes, I do," he said. He reached out for the pistol, but she still held it. "You must not harm him at any time," she said. "That is also understood?"

Beaujean let his glance go for just an instant to Wingate, then he nodded. "I made a mistake," he said.

"A bad one," she said, and gave him the pistol. He put it into the holster. He swung and walked from her and Wingate back toward the well. Aurélienne moved to where Wingate stood. She tenderly touched the bruises and cuts on his face. "It seems," she said, "that you and I must take care of each other, Tim. Come to the car, and I'll fix you up."

Wingate was sick at his stomach, dizzy from the beating. A blur was across his vision and he hardly saw her. But he stretched out his arms for her, tried to take her to him. "You're my girl," he said. "I love you."

She evaded him, made him follow her toward the car. "Be still," she said to him there. "I'm not out here to make love. All I want to do is to find my brother."

"The iceberg type," he said out of the dizziness. "That's you."

"I think you make me a compliment," she said. "But we must both watch Beaujean. He's changed. He hates you, and he'll kill you if he can."

Wingate was sitting on the running-board while she dabbed iodoform along his jaw. He was in possession of himself again, the thickness of shock gone from his brain. "How long's it going to last, Aurélienne?" he said. "What's the end of this rigamajig?"

"It ends," she said, "when I find my brother. Now go and help them fill the containers. We must get started for the Ahaggar." . . . .

Antelope raced on the ridges. There were gazelle which grazed on the tiny shoots of *acheb* grass but sprang away in great graceful leaps as they saw the camels, heard the car. First an opaline haze against the horizon, then dark and high and firm, the Ahaggar land rose. The scent of it came to them when the wind was out of that quarter: flowers and moist earth where grass grew thickly, the tang of cedars and the fumes of wood smoke. They were exhilarated by it and yet almost overwhelmed. After their weeks in the desert, those were the elements of a dream.

But tall men who dressed all in white, who wore face cloths as high as their eyes and rode magnificent camels came down out of the hills. The R'Gueibat stopped, they would not go near them. The white-robed men were the Touareg, of an alien blood and language, masters in their time of all the central Sahara and still worthy of a reputation which rendered both respect and fear

Beaujean went to meet them alone. He wore a clean shirt and the pistol was hidden from sight. He carried gifts for the Touareg chieftains, bandoleers of red Moroccan leather, spurs of solid silver, a sword in a pearl-studded scabbard.

"Quite a bunch of loot," Wingate said.

"The Touareg are important," Aurélienne said. "They control all of the Ahaggar and the country beyond. We will pick up gasoline and oil in there tonight or tomorrow."

WINGATE stirred uneasily on the seat. "I just don't savvy," he said. "I'm completely adrift. What are you doing, hooked up with a guy like Beaujean?"

"I can't answer you," she said. "Not now." Beaujean had made a signal from ahead and she put the car in gear. The R'Gueibat rode in, close beside the machine, kept there as they climbed the slope to where the Touareg waited with Beaujean.

There was a formal introduction of which Wingate got nothing. The eyes above the veils were dark and hard. They swept across him and Aurélienne and at sight of her there was a sharp, sudden lightening. But for the R'Gueibat they showed open contempt. The R'Gueibat were like shabby urchins beside these men. They held their heads bowed, and in response to the introduction only slightly raised them.

Beaujean mounted a camel and rode among the Touareg. He rode well, Wingate noticed, and added the fact to his steadily increasing knowledge of the man. The way was through pasture where small bright flowers grew in profusion. Flocks of sheep were on the slopes guarded by young boys and girls. The girls were bare-faced and bare-legged, wild and free in their movements, running right up to the car to stare in at them. Then upon a wider, smoother slope a camel herd moved down over the path. There were yearlings with bumpy knees who still nudged in behind their mothers, and great splendid beasts such as Wingate had never known. "The finest stock in the world," Aurélienne told him. "Tribes from all over the Eastern Desert come here to buy the Ahaggar mounts."

"But these guys act like fighting men," Wingate said. "Each one of them has a rifle, a sword and a spear."

Aurélienne smiled. "In the old days they used to be raiders. Now, though, they're kept busy protecting their stock."

"Against whom?"

"Against the Senussi, the people who live over in the region around Canteen Seven."

"A nice deal," Wingate said. "You and Beaujean certainly picked a dandy."

"It was made for us by circumstance," she said. "We had no choice. But do you want me to think that you have fright?"

"Shucks, no," he said. He laughed. "Not any more than I've had since the day we left Casablanca."

Beaujean had wheeled around to ride alongside the car. "Stop at the top of this ridge," he said to Aurélienne. "The encampment is right on the other side."

IT was getting dark when Aurélienne stopped the car. Through the shadow spread the low, leather tents of the Touareg—already nothing but a vague clutter. But firelight laced the night, set a scarlet gleam in a score of places. Women worked about the fires, called out to children who ran from tent to tent. There was the lowing of sheep from the slope below, dogs barked, camels and horses whinnied as they were led to water. "I smell *shashlik,*" Wingate said. "I ate it once in Greenwich Village, and I could use it again."

"Roast mutton, you mean," Aurélienne said. She was at the rear of the car, taking out the cookstove and some tins of food. "But it's not for us. That's for them."

"Beaujean's with them."

"Of course. The feast is in his honor. But he will be back over here in a bit to pick up his cask of rum. He must make the sheiks drunk tonight."

"I thought Mohammedans weren't supposed to drink hard liquor."

She made an expressive gesture, her nose wrinkled in a grimace. "Beaujean knows how to tempt them."

"Then," Wingate said slowly, "you and I'll be alone tonight. We'll have a chance to talk."

"Except for Ho and Hum," she said. "They will be with us."

"You're wrong. Those two characters shoved off some few minutes ago. I don't know whether the Touareg asked them to, or if they went under their own steam. Anyhow, they're gone."

Aurélienne put the food tins on the collapsible table she used. Her hands lifted her hair from her shoulders and she shook it until it clouded about her face. "A brook is down there," she said. "I'm going to take a swim in it after supper. I will take my last piece of soap and wash my hair."

"A real sport," Wingate said. He sat staring at her, telling himself how much he loved her. Beaujean's footsteps were so soft that he almost failed to hear the man. He started up, but Beaujean said: "I'm not here to bother you. But remember tonight that you will be watched all the time."

"Who will do that?" Aurélienne said, a note of anger high in her voice.

"My friends the Touareg," Beaujean said. He was shouldering the small wooden cask of rum, turning to go. "They don't trust you as much as I do. *Soyez sage,* Aurélienne."

Wingate waited for several minutes. He made sure that Beaujean was well down the slope. Then he said: "What's that '*soyez sage*' stuff mean?"

"A warning to me to be careful with you," Aurélienne said. "He would give me the idea that you are a wolf."

"Me?" Wingate was laughing. "I'm so meek I don't even growl."

Aurélienne was serious, unsmiling. "Sit down," she said. "Eat your supper while it is hot."

THEY were strangely silent during supper. Stars were up in the sky and the night was made luminous with silver light. At the Touareg tent drums were being played, a fife sounded, there was the wildness of cymbals. "Now the dancing girls will begin," Aurélienne said. "Pretty soon you'll hear their music."

"How do you know so much about this country?" Wingate said.

"My brother wrote me about it. Beaujean told me many stories of it while we were waiting to come here."

"But Beaujean's not your uncle."

"No, he's not."

"You lied to me about him."

"I lied." She had risen from the table, put the few dishes in a canvas bucket. "I'm going now down to the brook for my swim. I would like it if you came along."

"You must have believed me before when I said I wasn't much of a wolf."

She shook her head. "I think about the Touareg. If we are indeed being watched—"

"O.K.," Wingate said. "I'll keep the little girl out of harm."

The brook ran winding and fast through banks where bushes and wild flowers grew. Wingate found a spot about a hundred feet from where Aurélienne waded in, sat down and turned his back to her. He could hear the little gasp she gave when the water touched her legs, the whoop she made when it was up over her middle. Then there was just the murmurous sound of the brook itself, the splashing as she washed and the weird, fierce Touareg music.

He imagined a dozen times he saw staring eyes in the darkness. He tightened his fists, thinking of the men who might peer at Aurélienne while she was in the brook. But then he began to doubt what Beaujean had said. Nobody was watching Aurélienne, not now at least. Too much was going on over at the encampment.

The dancing girls were hard at work there. The pattern of the firelight was broken by their movement. They danced before one huge central fire and the twining of their arms, the writhing revolutions of their bodies showed above the men crouching shoulder to shoulder around them.

Wingate beat the rhythm of the drums upon his knee. He told himself that he loved Aurélienne. He loved her very much, yet he didn't understand her or what she was after. *You're off course all the way*, he said beneath his breath. *But you won't get back on unless you stick with her. She's a fine girl, no matter what she has to do with Beaujean.*

He got to his feet. Aurélienne was behind him on the bank. Her hair clung close to her face, and she was still panting from the cold force of the water. "I'm a much nicer and cleaner woman," she said.

"You're my honey," he said. "But all the gallery is over watching the dancers give out with their best." The throb of the Touareg music was in his veins now, and he took her roughly by the arms, pulled her to him, kissed her. "I'm crazy about you, Aurélienne, and if I weren't, I wouldn't be here."

"Go and take a swim of your own," she said. "It will do you good."

"Will you wait for me?" he said. "You won't run away?"

"I'll wait," she said.

HE stayed only a short time in the brook. Tonight was to be his with her, he repeated to himself. Tonight they were going to be alone.

They walked in stride up the slope towards the car after he was dressed, and she let him hold her hand. Then in deliberate imitation of the dancing girls she performed several steps over the grass. Wingate couldn't speak; his desire for her could only be expressed by taking her in his arms.

She kissed him back. Her passion matched his own. They stood for some time, their lips locked. Then she got away from him. She sat down on the running-board of the car and lit a cigarette. He saw that her hands were trembling a bit, and she asked him: "Are all men from Connecticut so violent?"

"I never took the trouble to find out," he said. "But if you won't make love, tell me the truth about all this. Tell me about yourself and what's really going on."

SHE regarded him with a level gaze while at the encampment the music, mounting shouts and cries made her thought all the more intense and grave. She recognized that she was falling in love with this man. He was the kind she had always sought in her life. Yet, she asked herself, just how far could she trust him? When she had met him he had been hysterical with brandy and the complexity of his personal problem. He too, she remembered, was driven by demons.

Money was his incentive for being here. If it it weren't for that, she could give him her full confidence. But thought of Beaujean held her back. Greed had done frightful things to Beaujean, and perhaps it might have the same effect upon Tim.

"I can tell you this much," she said. "The pilot, the man who died, was a friend of my brother's. He and Pierre served together in the desert before the war. He came to the villa that night because he didn't trust Beaujean. He wanted to leave word in Casablanca as to where we were going."

"Did he?"

"No. I talked him out of it. I believed in Beaujean."

"But then Beaujean had him killed at El Mengoub for private security reasons."

She nodded, feeling trapped, alone.

"Why," Wingate said, "did you at the start try to give me the idea you were Beaujean's niece?"

"Because it would make it simpler for all of us."

"Didn't you figure that Beaujean was in love with you and that I'd find out?"

"Not at the beginning, Tim. He is an older man. Many women have been in his life. I thought—"

"Yeah, I know what you thought. The sooner you're back in Mystic with me, the better off you'll be."

"Mystic is quite a distance from here."

But he paid no attention to that. "Is Pierre Varois really your brother?" he asked her. "Does Canteen Seven exist?"

She could only nod again, her impulse to weep so great she felt choked.

"I've got one more question," he said. "Is your brother all we're looking for out here?"

"I can't answer you," she said, "because I can't lie to you." She was up, advancing toward him, putting her arms around him. "I love you. I want to go and live in Mystic with you. Do, please, trust me, Tim. Let us find Canteen Seven and Pierre, then go straight to your Connecticut."

"All right," he said. He was closely holding her. "You're scared, and it's not because of me, but Beaujean. He's got the high sign on you somehow and I'll have to figure out by myself what it is."

"That high sign, I don't know what it means."

"Then we'll learn it together at Canteen Seven," he said, and laughed for her. "You'd better go grab your sleeping-bag and get in it and stay there. What's going on with the Touareg is giving me more wolfish ideas by the minute."

She kissed him, his eyes and his mouth "Then good night, Tim."

"Good night, my darling."

He was in his sleeping-bag and it was almost dawn when Beaujean came to the car. "Did you have a nice evening?" Beaujean said.

"Fair enough," Wingate answered, amazed at the man's ability to recognize he was awake. "But when do we head for Canteen Seven?"

"After I've had a few hours' sleep and we've got our gasoline and oil. I'd appreciate it if meanwhile you took care of things."

"How long have you had the idea that you can trust me?"

Stepping at an easy walk, came a camel-mounted patrol . . . On the back of a pack-camel was the limp body of a Touareg.

"Since Aurélienne fell in love with you." Beaujean unrolled his sleeping-bag, clambered into it. "She has the right sort of influence on you. With the R'Gueibat gone, the three of us make a nice little team."

"Dandy!" Wingate said. But Beaujean was already asleep and snoring.

PARTS of the pattern grew clear to Wingate during the next few days. In the Ahaggar the gasoline and oil with which they supplied the car were contained in tins carrying British Army markings. The twenty Touareg warriors who rode with them into the far desert all carried Enfield rifles and ammunition. A couple of the chieftains had Italian pistols and one a Luger parabellum, but otherwise each man's arms were identical. If Beaujean wasn't a gun-runner, Wingate reasoned, he worked very closely with a gang that was. That was the only solution to Beaujean's wealth, his knowledge of the desert and his influence over these fierce fighting-men. They needed modern weapons to maintain their hold over the Ahaggar, and Beaujean saw that they got them.

The course was now southeast by east. This was the edge of the famous Ténéré desert, and a place to be dreaded, from what Beaujean told him of it. He and Beaujean had returned to their usual routine of dawn conferences after Wingate took his star sights. Beaujean was very careful to be sure of the course. He spent hours wearing the radio head-phones, and Wingate knew that he was listening to every French military broadcast. The Touareg rode in loose skirmishing formation out on both wings; it was obvious they were there to intercept any patrol from the Camel Corps posts.

Aurélienne kept to herself a great deal. She seemed to be preoccupied with her own thoughts and she rarely took the chance to talk with Wingate. He thought he also understood that. They were at last getting close to Canteen Seven, and for her the tension was all but unbearable. In another few days she would know whether her brother was alive or dead. Hope and fear, alternating, held her remote.

The mountains they sought, the Afafi range, were apparent in the dawn light of the fifth day from the Ahaggar. Wingate studied them through the sextant telescope. They were weirdly shaped, bleak and high. No vegetation showed; the slopes were reddish-gray volcanic rock. The upper reaches were cut by chasms, precipice followed precipice to where the summits were lost in the loom of cloud.

Wingate was once more impressed by Beaujean's skillful planning. No plane could land safely anywhere in this desert. The trip by car from El Mengoub had been difficult and slow, yet absolutely necessary.

Beaujean stood near him, a powerful pair of binoculars at his eyes. He lowered them to glance at Wingate. "I'm not sure, of course," he said, "but I don't think Canteen Seven is located up in there. Colonel Dornano chose to come close to the mountains only so that they'd serve as a possible hiding-place for his troops."

"Then where do we start our search?"

"At the foot of the mountains. We'll spread out and circle around them. You'd better drive, and give Aurélienne a chance to rest."

The Touareg were moving out to the right and left in two widely spaced groups. They seemed to know the country, kept their camels at a steady trot over the rough, rocky ridges. Beaujean had mounted a narrow-flanked beast, gone with the group to the left, called to Wingate to go to the right in the car.

The shots when they came were from the left and several miles away.

The reports were coupled together, made by a rifle. But their echo was punctured by the rapid vibrance of an automatic weapon. Wingate took the car out of gear, let it roll to a halt. "I expected that," Aurélienne said. Her voice was dim, hardly more than a whisper. "It is a Camel Corps patrol, probably from Fort Chartet. The Native Bureau has agents among the Touareg, and we have been reported."

WINGATE sat silent a moment. The warriors still in sight had put their animals to the gallop toward the mountains. But Beaujean was riding back to the car. He seemed unhurried and unalarmed.

"Why isn't he worried?" Wingate asked Aurélienne.

"He expected it also. All of this desert is well patrolled. The biggest chance we had was to cross here."

"But Beaujean's still got some trick he's going to work," Wingate said. "He isn't whipped yet. I can tell just by looking at the guy."

Beaujean dismounted at the side of the car. He secured the camel so that it could not run away, then brought his gaze to Aurélienne and Wingate. "Too bad, eh?" he said. "Some man disloyal to the clans must have betrayed us, carried word of us to the Camel Corps. But as a French citizen I can't involve myself in any fight with a unit of our forces. So follow my ex-

ample. Allow yourselves to be taken prisoner by the patrol."

"As a citizen," Wingate said," you've already broken the law. Don't you know some stunt now to get us out of this?"

But Beaujean didn't allow his control to break. He held himself motionless. Across the ridge to the left, stepping at an easy walk, came a camel-mounted line of about fifteen men. They were armed with carbines, wore short khaki robes and turbans. Their officer had his azure kepi looped with the double gold bands of a senior lieutenant. He rode several paces ahead of the line. Behind it on the back of a pack camel was the limp body of a Touareg. Then, so Wingate thought swiftly, the other warriors who were out in the desert had got away. That dead man was the one who had fired the shots.

The lieutenant brought his mount to a halt in front of Beaujean. He tapped the beast on the neck, and it knelt to allow him to slide from the beautifully housed saddle. In his hands was a carved camel stick. His rifle was hung from his shoulder by the sling-strap. The appraisal he gave them was calm, quite quick. Then he touched his kepi visor with the stick in informal salute and said, *"Bon jour, messieurs, mademoiselle."*

Beaujean made him a little but not at all ludicrous bow. "I speak in English," he said, "because one of us, the young man, is an American. You know the language?"

"Very well." And the lieutenant slightly smiled. "After Bir Hacheim, I was with the Eighth British Army. My name, Lenissic. My post, Fort Chartet. Get out of the automobile, you two. Now your names and your reasons for being here?"

"Myself," Beaujean said, "Louis Beaujean. The young lady is Mademoiselle Aurélienne Varois. The American is named Wingate." Beaujean paused, for Aurélienne was very pale, holding herself erect with difficulty. "Mademoiselle looks for her brother, Pierre, a former officer in your corps and reported last to be living a captive among the Senussi. The American is chasing mademoiselle and anything he can pick up along the way."

"Thank you," the lieutenant said. He called to one of his troopers, a man who wore sergeant's stripes sewn on the front of his robe. The sergeant dismounted and came forward pistol in hand. He searched Beaujean, took the automatic, then searched Wingate and Aurélienne. Then he saluted the lieutenant, got back into the saddle.

"YOU will take us to Fort Chartet?" Beaujean said.

"Yes," the lieutenant said. A sudden frown showed on his sun-darkened face. "You have no right at all in this area. Also, we've been fired upon by Touareg. We'll be happy to find out how you get the Touareg to do your fighting for you, Beaujean."

Beaujean shook his head, half smiling. "You must understand that I'll only talk further in the presence of my attorney."

"Listen, Lieutenant," Wingate said, aware that at his side Aurélienne sagged in the final stages of collapse. "I'm a foreigner, a broken-down sailor who's got less right here than anybody else. But this girl's really looking for her brother. You must know about him. Can't you help her find him?"

The lieutenant's keen blue eyes swept to Aurélienne. Then he said: "Pierre Varois is living with a clan of the Senussi up beyond the old Italian border. At Fort Chartet we've had various reports about him. They say he's nearly blind as the result of a wound. He doesn't want to go back to civilization."

"You,"—Aurélienne was starting to reel forward, to fall—"you could bring me to Pierre?"

"No, I couldn't," the lieutenant said. His lean young face was anxious as he reached out with Wingate to catch her. She was unconscious in Wingate's arms. The lieutenant cursed. "That's straight against my orders," he took care to explain to Wingate. "The place is more than a hundred kilometers from here, and in most dangerous country."

"All right," Wingate said, "I'm not the man to argue with you. But what happens to us?"

"You'll spend the night here," the lieutenant said. "In the morning we'll start back to the fort. My commandant will be most pleased to have Beaujean as his guest."

Wingate reached for the Bren gun. . . . A Touareg plunged helplessly from his camel.

"Call me a prisoner," Beaujean said. "It will make it all sound better later on."

But the lieutenant was turning to his men to call out orders. All but four of them dismounted and those rode forth as sentinels. The others went toward the nearest ridge, stacked their arms, tethered their beasts and began to make camp. "Put Mademoiselle Varois in the car and make her comfortable," the lieutenant told Wingate. "One of my troopers will be nearby to watch out for you."

It was impossible for Wingate to hold back the words and the hatred he put into them: "How about him—Uncle Louis?"

"He and I are going over to the camp for a little talk," the lieutenant said. There was the suggestion of a smile about his mouth. "It will be without witnesses, so Louis won't need his lawyer."

Wingate had Aurélienne in his arms, was lifting her into the car. But he took time to say, "Then ask him how come the Touareg have all got Enfield rifles. Get him to tell you about the stock of British Army gasoline and oil in the Ahaggar."

"But of course," the lieutenant said. He slowly swung the camel stick. "Most certainly I will."

With dusk a cool wind came from off the mountains. Wingate welcomed it as he worked at the stove, opening tins of rations. The wind had its effect on Aurélienne. It was bringing her around. Now she sat up in the car and called out to him: "I'm hungry, Tim. Be sure you cook enough for me."

He laughed, joyous to see how refreshed she seemed. "If you've still got an appetite for this stuff after weeks of it, you must be well." But when she was with him and they sat together at supper he noticed that her eyes were still somber, tragic. "You haven't given up yet," he told her. "You're thinking of Pierre."

"No," she said. "I realize there's no hope. But it's frightfully hard to have come so far and then be cheated. I've begun to hate Beaujean as much as you do."

"Can you tell me now about Beaujean, about how you got hooked up with him?"

"Yes, I can," she said after a moment's hesitation. "He sought me out in Casablanca more than two years ago. He claimed to be some sort of a cousin of my mother's, but what interested me was the fact that he had news of Pierre. It was after listening to him that I really believed that Pierre lived."

"But what's in the deal for Beaujean? Why would he give a hoot about your brother being saved?"

"I don't know," Aurélienne slowly said. "I've never been sure. After the war, my family went back to France, but I stayed on in Casablanca. My mind was made up to go into the desert with Beaujean for Pierre. But only this I realize about Beaujean's own interest in coming: At Canteen Seven there is more than just military supplies. Also, I have the idea that Beaujean lies when he says he knows where Canteen Seven is. He needs Pierre to find it for him. That makes sense?"

"Enough to give me the slant I need on Beaujean. You should have told me this before, though."

"I was afraid, Tim. There is such a hatred between you, I didn't dare tell you any more about him."

"But right now," Wingate said, "I'm grateful to him. He's doing it for his own reasons, of course, but he's giving us some chance to find your brother."

"How?"

"Beaujean has kept the lieutenant busy, so that we can escape. He wants us out of the way when the Touareg attack the patrol. Those warriors who left this afternoon will be back. Beaujean's their boy. He gets them their guns. They wouldn't like him to go to jail any more than he likes it himself. So it'll be a real finish fight."

"You frighten me, Tim."

"I thought you wanted to save your brother."

"I do. It's the most important thing in my life. But we have no accurate idea of where Pierre may be."

"How many blind Frenchmen are living with the Senussi?"

HER hands gripped together in excitement. She was leaning toward him and now her eyes glowed. "Only Pierre," she said. "There couldn't be any other."

"Then we must go," she said. "Shove off, sailor."

He kissed her. "I'm surely not going to leave you here," he said. Then he turned to watch the Camel Corps trooper posted to guard them.

The man sat slouched in the lee of the ridge behind them. His camel was tethered, plucked noisily at a pile of fodder. The distance between the trooper and the car was more than fifty yards, Wingate figured. That was easy shooting range, but the rear of the car was piled with containers of provisions, water and oil. They should stop a fair amount of bullets. The rest of it was just luck.

"Get in, chum," Wingate said. "Sit down on the floor and stay there."

"But you'll be exposed if you drive."

"Get in, chum," Wingate said again. He was pressing the starter button, racing the motor to slide into second gear. He heard the trooper shout. The trooper called, "*Halte-là!*" A well-trained man, Wingate thought, one who believed in the book and challenged before he shot. Then the bullets came. They had a creaking whine in ricochet. One hit the windshield frame with a solid smack, but that was the last.

Wingate shifted into high gear and put the accelerator button right down to the floor. He had a blurred impression of Aurélienne as he navigated in and out among the boulders and over the first ridge. She sat with her arms around her knees to keep in her crouched position, but her head was lifted and she watched every move he made.

"Come out of the booby hatch," he said. "We're free folks." He lowered his speed, put the car on a due north course with the dashboard compass.

"Are you all right?"

"Shaky but sound."

"Let me drive."

"Do I look that bad?"

"No. But I think you should check the charts."

"You're a nice girl to have on a midnight cruise. Wait till we get over this ridge."

He checked and rechecked the charts. From where they were to the closest indication of any sort of an inhabited place across the border in the Fezzan was one hundred and ten kilometers. "Eight hours' driving time at an average of fourteen kilometers an hour should bring us there," he said.

"But you must sleep now," Aurélienne said, "and I feel fine."

He was rummaging around in the various drawers and compartments and finally said: "The best weapon we've got is a tire-wrench. We're running strictly on luck, honey."

"I understand," she said. She reached over and tousled his hair. "Now let me drive while you sleep."

"You'll call me if you need me?"

"At once," she said. . . .

He was still with the chill of dawn when she shook him awake. "We're just at the border," she said. "Ahead is a *redjem*."

He stared blinking at the stone trail marker. "Then we've made our course good. Let's stop and celebrate and have a cup of coffee."

"But why not keep on going?"

"Then I'll drive. Move over."

It made all of his senses sharp to have the wheel under his hands once more. He saw that there were other *redjem* ahead and from time to time along the flat and sandy ground were old, dry camel droppings, the dim marks of hoofs. The wind was from east of north. It lacked the hot, harsh breath of the regular desert wind. In it was a very slight trace of moisture, the faint smell of green grass.

The man they met first was a camel herder. His herd was down in a valley where short, sparse grass grew. Hearing the car, he mounted a saddled

animal, brought out of the scabbard an old Martini carbine.

Wingate kept the car slowly moving toward him. "How's your Senussi talk?" he asked Aurélienne.

"Not much," she said. "But I will try it."

The Senussi sat immobile in the saddle. He was an old man with a cataract in one eye and a worn, colorless robe. But Wingate noticed that the good eye was very sharp.

"Salaam aleikoum," Aurélienne said to him when the car drew abreast.

The Senussi repeated it after her and then was silent.

"Faransawi?" Aurélienne said.

Very gradually the Senussi's gaze lifted to Aurélienne. He pointed to the north and made a nodding motion.

"Nice sort of guy," Wingate said when he had the car going forward. "The talkative kind. But what's *faransawi* mean?"

"Frenchman," Aurélienne said. "I only hope, though, that he was right."

"I think he's a pretty reliable citizen," Wingate said. "We're going to find Pierre."

AGAINST the vast brassy sky of the desert day palm fronds were delicate beyond belief. They lifted above a dune crest where a young boy upon a donkey rode at furious speed. The boy went down the far side out of sight, but the sound of his voice joined the braying of the donkey. "That must be the oasis," Aurélienne said. "We—" Her voice broke. She touched Wingate's cheek. "You've taken a tremendous chance to help me, Tim."

"Skip it," he said. Mounted men, warriors who rode fast camels and who were armed, were coming over the dune past the palms. He braked the car and stopped the motor. "We'll wait right here for them."

A warrior with the green turban of a Meccan pilgrim listened expressionlessly to what Aurélienne had to say. Then he swung around, motioned the car forward. The camels started in a gallop and Wingate went into high gear to keep pace with them.

Water ran between the mud-brick walls of canals in the oasis. Shadow from the palms ribbed the sunlight. There were many children, and goats, yapping dogs, then row upon row of low, striped woolen tents.

The man with the green turban made a gesture and Wingate said, "Here we are, honey." He helped her from the car, for she was trembling, and her face was pale and tense.

In front of them a tent drapery had been drawn back. They advanced as the green-turbaned man beckoned. Panther skins were underfoot. Embroidered leather cushions were along the walls. A mosque lamp of wrought copper was on an ivory-inlaid tabouret and around it were silver ewers and platters, fragile, very small coffee cups of the colors of flowers.

At an inner doorway stood a man dressed in white muslin. Gold-fringed ornaments hung from his jacket. He wore a gold-studded belt over a crimson silk sash. His boots were of red leather, the spurs of inlaid gold. Wingate stared at the face. It was old, haggard with the bitterness of many campaigns. The deep-set eyes went from him to Aurélienne and Wingate could sense their power, the keen intelligence that directed them. Here was the leader of the clan. Here was a man who had experienced both victory and defeat.

The man was talking with Aurélienne. He used what Wingate thought to be scraps of French and Italian. "The chief tells us to sit down," Aurélienne said to Wingate. "He tells us to be patient and calm. Pierre is here. Somebody has gone to get him."

Wingate found himself incapable of speech. He sat upon one of the leather cushions and all through his body passed, pounding, the fatigue of the trip. He wanted to talk to Aurélienne, express to her how happy he was that her brother was here. But all his will power was needed to stay awake. He turned to watch the sun-bright doorway, waiting for Pierre Varois.

A tall Negro was at the doorway. He pulled back the drapery wide and extended his hand to a man who stood beyond. That man came quickly into the tent. He walked with confidence, as though he had been in the place often and knew each piece of furniture it contained. But he was nearly sightless; he carried a cane and with it he tapped lightly upon the rugs over which he walked.

"Pierre," Aurélienne said. "Pierre, *c'est moi.*"

Pierre Varois halted his forward movement. He let the cane drop and the narrow, wound-ugly face became rigid. His hands drew down the hem of the faded khaki tunic he wore. Then they lifted, brushed the hair back from his brow.

"Aurélienne?" He whispered it.

Wingate looked away as they embraced. He didn't want to act like a fool and cry, he told himself, and the best thing was not to watch them. But they talked for a long time, and mostly it was Aurélienne's voice that he heard. She was trying to persuade her brother to come home, Wingate realized. But if Pierre wanted to stay, that wasn't hard to understand. Blind and alone, the last survivor of his group, he'd found friends among these people. He was safe here in his loneliness, but back in Morocco or in France everything would be different. If he, Timothy Wingate, had been unhappy in his home town of Mystic, then Pierre's thoughts of return must be filled with doubt and fear for the future.

But it was obvious that Aurélienne's presence had a great effect on Pierre. The fact that she had risked so much, come so far to reach him, showed her love for him and her faith in his ability to restore himself in his former life. Sister and brother were holding hands, and now Aurélienne laughed a bit, and Wingate knew that she had won. Pierre was to leave the Senussi, go back home.

Aurélienne and Pierre rose. They came across the tent to Wingate. The wound was high up on the temple, Wingate saw, as he and Pierre stood close to shake hands. A rifle bullet had done it and severely injured the optic nerve. But with the skill developed in the war a good surgeon might do a good deal. It was quite possible Pierre would regain his sight. "I wish to thank you," Pierre said in slow English, "to tell you how grateful I am."

"Don't do that," Wingate said. "Has Aurélienne told you I'm in love with her?"

"It was the first thing she told me about you."

Aurélienne said, smiling: "You two make me feel like a very little girl who can't make up her own mind. But he's going back with us, Tim. He says the sheik has proven to be his good friend. Some sort of feast is being prepared for us, and then we can leave."

"That feast stuff is fine," Wingate said. "I've eaten so much canned goods there's rust on my teeth."

They sat on piles of rugs with the sheik and some of the other senior warriors and ate from great platters of roast mutton and rice, sucked sugar-rich coffee from the little cups. In the outer tent drummers played, and there was the mournful, almost monotone music of fifes. Then the sheik dipped his finger tips in rose-water, wiped them on a silk towel. He rose and bowed, shook hands with each of them, but to Pierre he gave a gold-chased dagger whose hilt was embedded with pearls. Then in time to the drumbeats, with the short stride of a man who had spent years in the saddle, he went from the tent.

"THERE goes a real man," Pierre said. "Some of his people crossed the border without orders and attacked my group. So ever since he has felt himself responsible for me. But it's time we left. What is our course going to be, Tim?"

"That gets a question from me," Wingate said. "Did you ever hear of a place called Canteen Seven?"

"Surely. I was wounded near there."

"Then you could give me the compass directions to reach it."

"But I don't want to go back into the desert," Aurélienne said. "My

face, it has been burned by the sun until it begins to look like a most old shoe."

"We need oil and gasoline, chum," Wingate told her. "The supply in the car is almost gone. I figured Canteen Seven is the only spot where we could get some."

"It is," Pierre Varois said. "A stock of several hundred liters was left there."

"All right, then, Canteen Seven," Aurélienne said. But as they started out of the tent she took Wingate by the arm, drew him a bit aside. "Are you sure," she murmured, "you don't want to go back to give Beaujean a crack in the head?"

He grinned. "We'd make a swell team, the three of us against Beaujean and the Touareg. But once we get what we need at Canteen Seven, we head straight away from all such characters."

GOING south, Aurélienne and he drove in shifts. Pierre sat between them, told them of the desert years and of the famous raid against Murzuq. "Our colonel, Dornano, was a great man. He planned the whole thing. He took us, Camel Corps and Senegalese *tirailleurs*, from Fort Lamy and Lake Tchad in Central Africa. We marched by night, hid and slept by day. We never went near a waterhole known to other men. We found our own, or used caches like Canteen Seven that had been prepared for us. It was hard, very hard. The Senegalese were not men used to the desert. At night some of them froze to death, and others died of sunstroke in the day. Then my group was attacked, all killed but me. I was four days alone in the desert, hidden in the smashed Italian plane, before the Senussi found me. They thought my wound was so bad that I would die, but they brought me north with them. It was their idea that maybe if I lived I would tell them about the gold."

"What gold?" Wingate said, trying to keep his voice level.

"That the Italian plane carried. It was meant for the Touareg clans, to bribe them to fight against us as we came north. The amount would be half a million dollars in your money, all in coin. But the plane lost course in a sandstorm. It crashed at the foot of the Afafi mountains about twenty kilometers from Canteen Seven. We in the column saw the plane as it burned. Colonel Dornano detached me and my group to go and look at it."

"You got the gold?" Aurélienne asked, staring at Pierre.

"Yes," Pierre said. "We took it from the plane. It was held in steel boxes which the fire did not harm. I knew the value of it to the Touareg, how many rifles it would buy for them. So I had my men carry it to Canteen Seven. There we buried it and started to dig out the supplies needed by the column. But then we were attacked. Afterward—" He shrugged and put his fingers against the wound on his brow.

"Afterward," Wingate went on in a harsh voice, "Louis Beaujean heard about the gold." He spoke to Aurélienne, watching her. "That was the reason Beaujean was willing to come out here. It's why he approached you; Pierre was the one man who could lead him to the stuff."

"Who is this Beaujean?" Pierre said.

"A first-class punk," Wingate said.

Aurélienne said something in French which Wingate didn't understand, but which brought a scarlet rush of color into Pierre's face. He gripped Wingate hard by the shoulder. "I'll take you to the gold," he told Wingate. "We will bring it back with us to the North. My sister says that France is very poor, could use such a treasure."

"That's right," answered Wingate. "You've got a very good idea." . . .

They halted once when he and Aurélienne were too tired to drive farther. Aurélienne heated coffee and a can of beef for them. They dozed for a bit, then Wingate figured their position on the chart, told it to Pierre. "Canteen Seven is about thirty kilometers southeast of here," Pierre said. "When you see a ridge in the mountains formed like a 'w' then you are right in front of it. On a few kilometers more and you will see the plane. That gives the way straight to the cache."

"Then we must have passed close to it last night," Wingate said. "It can't be far from where the patrol caught us with Beaujean."

"Let us forget Beaujean," Aurélienne said. "Please, let us go to Canteen Seven and then as quickly as we can home."

Wingate drove swiftly through the remaining hours of the night. He could see his old tracks in the starlight and he followed them. In the back of his head thought of Beaujean kept repeating itself. He was getting within the man's range again, he knew. Things weren't through between him and Beaujean. With half a million in gold to fight for, Beaujean wasn't going to quit. It could only finish with him dead or Beaujean dead. He was like that and so was Beaujean. But why tell Aurélienne? She had enough to worry her. Drive, then—make it snappy!

The ridge in the mountains which Pierre had described showed sharp against the morning sun. Wingate took a bearing on it, then used the sextant to approximate his distance. He drove the car in low gear, leaning out over the side to watch the ground. But Aurélienne saw the wreck of the plane first, and she let out a little cry.

Wingate got from the car and walked around the twisted, blackened remnants. He made out the markings on the wings. He was able to distinguish in the fuselage the sand-drifted clutter of bones that in all probability had been the bodies of the crew. Then Aurélienne called to him and he ran back to the car.

"Keep on, Tim," she said. "Every moment we spend here I become more and more nervous. Something might happen at any time."

"Take it easy, honey," he said. "We're safe enough."

The speedometer read seventeen kilometers from the wreck of the plane when he stopped again. There was a slight depression in the sand ahead and scattered around it was a loose, uneven pattern of stones. He told Pierre about the depression and how the stones lay. "That should be it," Pierre said. "Dig beneath the stones."

He dug in wild excitement, flinging the stones and sand aside. Then the spade blade clacked over metal. One after another he lifted out flat steel boxes. They were very heavy. In them, he knew, was the gold. He carried them over to the car, stacked them in the rear. "*Vive la France*," he panted. "I never felt so honest in my life."

"Let me help you with the rest of it," Aurélienne said. "Then we will be faster away from here."

"No," he said. "You stay with Pierre. The rest won't take long." He swiped the sweat from his face and went back to the digging.

The gasoline and oil were in shallow holes. He had little trouble in hefting out the tins and bringing them to the car. But underneath, at the bottom of the last hole he opened, was a wooden case. He pried the top from that with the spade. It held a Bren gun and several hundred rounds of ammunition.

The piece was smeared with cosmoline that had gone rancid in the heat, but the action still worked and it was in good conditions. He put it back in the case, for Aurélienne was running toward him from the car.

"LOOK to the west," she said. "Out beyond that ridge."

"Touareg," he said after he had made out the white, motionless figures.

She was trembling, trying to hold her hands still. She said, "Beaujean must have sent them. He ordered them to watch for us here."

"He'd like his car back," Wingate said, the rage burning in him until he could hardly speak. "He doesn't mind, either, that I've done his dig-

ging for him and found the gold. I should have thought of this."

"I did," Aurélienne said. "All night long I worried about it. But there was nothing else we could do but come here."

"We're not whipped yet," Wingate said. "I count twelve of his men along the ridge. That means Beaujean's still held by the patrol. His plan must be to have those boys take the car and get us out of the way before they attack the patrol. When the fight comes off, he wants all his men in it."

Aurélienne was looking down at the Bren gun. She bent and slid her fingers along the barrel. "Could you—" she began.

"I can handle it," Wingate said. "When I first went to sea in the war, we were our own gunners. I learned to use all sorts of stuff."

"But Pierre is with us, and helpless."

"He's a soldier. The Camel Corps is his old outfit. Pierre will be mighty glad of anything we do."

"Then let us tell him," she said.

THEY went to the car carrying the Bren gun and its ammunition in the case. Wingate cleaned it as they talked with Pierre. "If the Camel Corps patrol has fifteen men," Pierre said, "this Beaujean will be pretty certain of himself before he has his Touareg go for them. We're three—two. Our chance is to try and join up with the patrol. What do you think, Tim?"

"I think," Wingate said, "that you make very good sense."

He and Aurélienne loaded the gasoline and oil in the body of the car, secured it with cross-lashings. They finished near mid-afternoon and immediately Wingate started the car. He swung south, driving as close as he could to the mountains. But the Touareg rode far out, well beyond gun shot. "They don't want to bother us yet," Wingate said. "They just want to keep us safely under wraps."

"When do you believe we will reach the patrol?" Aurélienne said.

"After sundown, if they're still in the same place," Wingate said. He was trying to remember how high a Bren gun jumped when you fired it fast, and if you could fire it from the hip.

"Sundown will be a time the Touareg like," Pierre said. "They aren't as good marksmen as our troopers, and their style is to charge in at the gallop, fight with the spear and sword."

Wingate was silent, watching the sun meet the horizon and the shadows stretch wide from the mountains. He had the whole thing planned, he knew; still he didn't want to tell these people about it. Maybe it wouldn't work. Maybe it would turn up being a damn' fool idea as a lot of other things of his had done. But it had to work. This was the most important time of his life. He was either right tonight, or he was wrong for keeps

The Touareg riders were closing in upon the car. A couple of them had got around to the mountain side, up into the foothills, and then down again, to flank on both wings. Their robes showed faintly as the night breeze fluttered them, and as yet they took no trouble to seek cover. "Let me drive now," Aurélienne said. "Show me how it works, the gun."

"Like this," Wingate said when she had the wheel. "The clip feeds in here, and here's the trigger."

"A good little gun," Pierre said. "A number of them were left for the column all along the way. But give me some of the clips. I will hold them ready and pass them on to you."

"A solid suggestion," Wingate said. Then the bullet hit the windshield. Glass cracked back over them, cut their faces and hands. Aurélienne rammed the car against a boulder and the motor stalled. "Get out, get down!" Pierre muttered. "The car makes too easy a target."

"No," Wingate said. "We've got to keep going in the car. We can't do without it." He backed the car from the boulder, put it in gear once more. Bullets caromed off the hood, ripped the canvas cover overhead.

"We will be killed here, Tim," Aurélienne said. "Why don't we take the gun and run and try to join the patrol?"

Wingate didn't answer. He was standing erect to look around him in the night. They were less than a kilometer from the patrol. It was at the same place, down behind the curving ridge ahead. The bursts fired at them had been a signal for the attack upon the patrol. Flickers of orange flame marked the carbines as the troopers met the first rush. But the main part of the Touareg hadn't joined yet in the assault. They delayed to make sure of the car; that was their orders from Beaujean. Then his plan was right, Wingate told himself. Beaujean was gambling everything to get the car and what it carried.

"Hang on," Wingate said, glancing down at Aurélienne and Pierre. "This is going to be a bit rugged."

Three or four Touareg were racing their camels toward the car. He was amazed at the animals' speed and the rapidity with which their riders could fire from the saddle. Bullets were chunking into the car from both sides. One sent a ripple of air along his neck and he had an almost overwhelming impulse to stop. But then he found the headlight button, pushed it.

The headlights were so bright they startled him, and he suddenly remembered that never before had he seen them turned on. But if they startled him, he thought, they certainly should get the same result from the camels. That was his pitch, his cute little deal against Beaujean.

He slewed the car around in an open space between boulders and aimed the headlights straight at the nearest pair of camels. The beams caught upon their eyes. They reared and bucked, kicking, and he could see from the withdrawn lips how they screamed. The troopers couldn't hold them. One of them and then the other bolted, ran furiously away.

He executed a full half-turn which buckled the left front fender back against a boulder, but brought the headlights upon the second pair. He let them have the glare for only a few seconds and then they broke and ran. But this time he hauled on the brake and reached for the Bren gun.

A Touareg plunged helplessly from his camel, his bare shanks flopping as he died. The other Touareg was behind a boulder. Wingate started to get out and go after him, but Aurélienne said, "We must keep going to the patrol, Tim. Now let me drive."

They went straight through to the patrol like that. Aurélienne covered the targets with the headlights, then Wingate let bursts from the Bren gun into them. Pierre said, *"Bon, bon!"* as he heard the bursts and he had the fresh clips ready.

The young lieutenant, Lenissic, was the one who finally stopped them. He stepped into the twin paths of radiance and lifted his kepi on his rifle muzzle as a signal of cease firing. "All over," he yelled. "The one remaining thing is to collect and count the dead."

"Beaujean?" Wingate said.

The lieutenant pointed in back of him and then made a motion with his thumb turned down. Wingate sprang from the car and ran to him through the still kneeling troopers. "I don't know quite when it was," the lieutenant said, "because I was busy. But Beaujean tried to escape from us and get out of here. He rose; he ran; and as he ran, a Touareg bullet met him. That was one meant for us. But it struck him exactly between the eyes. I believe he wanted it so. He knew you were coming. He knew you had that very nice gun."

WINGATE went to look at Beaujean for an instant. But it wasn't necessary, he knew. All he'd been after was Beaujean dead. He turned and the young lieutenant was right beside him. "Yesterday," the lieutenant said, "Beaujean told me of the town from which you come. Do I have it right when I say Mystic?"

"Correct as hell," Wingate said.

"But for my report," the lieutenant said, "I must be able to spell it."

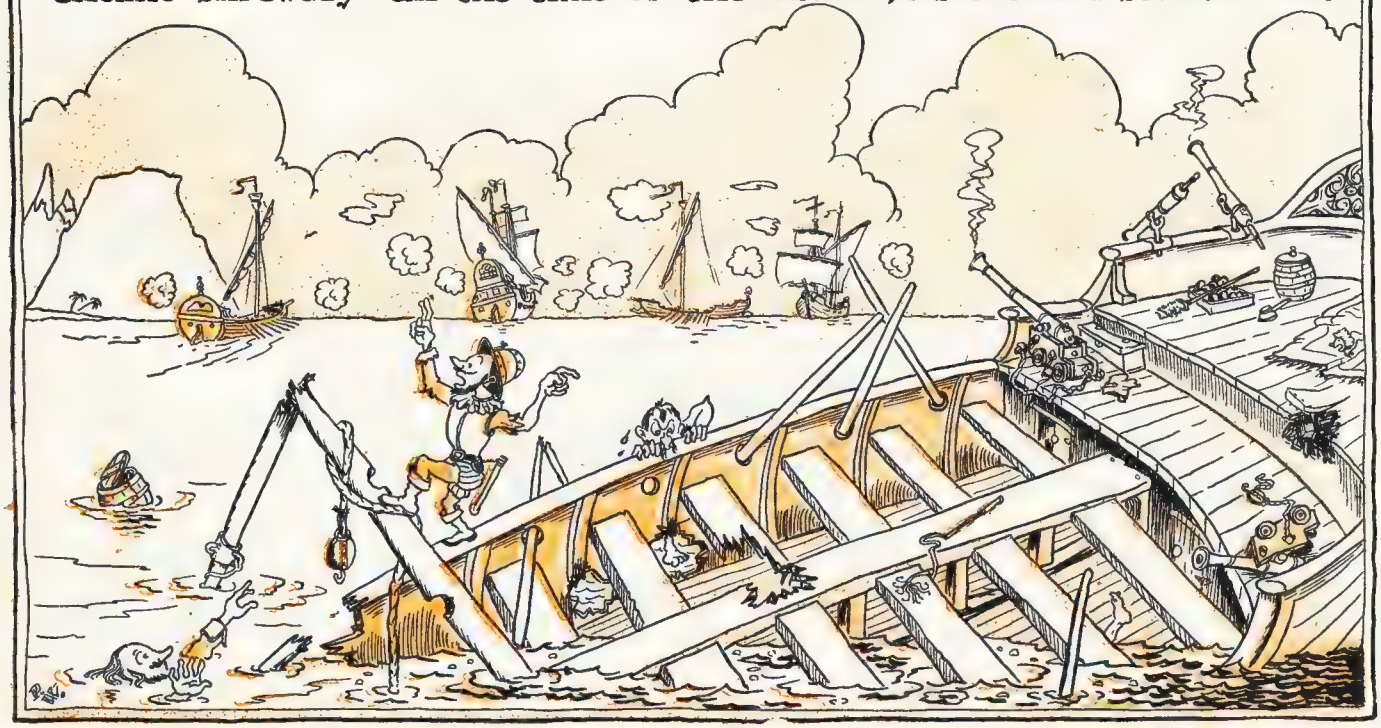
Wingate shook his head. "I'm sorry, soldier," he said. "But I've got to give my girl her lesson first."

The Valiant Fight

performed by 10. Merchants ships of London, against 12. Spanish gallies in the Straights of Gibralter... April, 1590

from Richard Hakluyt's "Principall Navigations of the English Nation" here newly & bravely illuminated by Peter Wells

When they came somewhat neerer unto us, they waved us a maine for the King of Spaine, and wee waved them a maine for the Queene of England, at which time it pleased Almightie God greatly to incourage us all in such sort, as that the neerer they came the lesse we feared their great multitudes and huge number of men, which were planted in those Gallies to the number of two or three hundred men in ech Gallie... Whereupon the Salomon being a hot shippe, and having sundry cast pieces in her, gave the first shotte in such a sowre sort, as that it shared away so many men as sate on the one side of a Gallie, and pierced her through in such maner, as that she was ready to sinke, which made them to assault us the more fiercely. Whereupon the rest of our shippes ... gave a hot charge upon them, and they at us, where began a hot and fierce battaile with great valiancie the one against the other... Thus we continued in fight sixe houres and somewhat more, wherein God gave us the upper hand and we escaped the hands of so many enemies, who were constrained to flie into harbour and shroude themselves from us, and with speed to seeke for their owne safetie. This was the handie worke of God, who defended us all from danger in such sort, as that there was not one man of us slaine. And in this fierce assault made upon us by the Spanish power, wee sustained no hurt or damage at all more then this, that the shrouds and backe-stay of the Salomon, who gave the first and last shot, and galled the enemie shrewdly all the time of the battell, were clean striken off.



IN THIS SHORT NOVEL, THE THREAT OF ATOMIC WAR LEADS TO THE EXPLORATION OF A GIGANTIC AND FASCINATING CAVERN—AND TO THE SOLUTION OF A STRANGE MURDER MYSTERY.

The WAY

by ROBERT ARMIN SHAFTEL

Illustrated by

"HAS anybody phoned to back out of the trip, Miss Wayne?"

"Only Dr. Ames. He's flying to Washington to attend an obstetricians' conference. Will that spoil your trip, sir?"

"Oh, no. There'll be four of us left. That's a handy bunch for crawling through a cave. Did you get the weather report?"

"I got a positive '*No rain*' from the Bureau."

Jim Braden laughed delightedly.

"Committed themselves, huh? Then we're really safe."

"You rush over to see Cleland, now," his secretary urged. "He's phoned twice to make sure you'll bring the tunnel estimates."

He shook his head in mock dismay.

"If I didn't like the guy so much, I'd make him quit camping on my coat-tails. Well, I don't want to aggravate him, so I'll hurry over there. If I land this contract, Lou, you and Craig get a raise in pay."

"We'd be rooting for you, anyway. Your brief-case is all packed."

He hurried into his inner office—a tall, wiry man of thirty-three, with a quick, easy way of handling himself. He had gray eyes, unruly dark hair, a rugged face that warmed infectiously when he smiled. He nodded to his draftsman, and picked up his brief-case and a roll of engineering drawings. As he passed through the outer office again, the telephone pealed.

"I'll take it," Miss Wayne said. "It's likely just another reporter wanting to know how to spell '*speleological.*' .... Hello?" She frowned, then said: "It's important, Mr. Braden."

Jim took the phone and said: "Braden talking."

"I'm Dr. Ross Dunn. Mr. Braden, I understand that you are leading a trip of exploration through Holcomb Cave?"

"I've arranged it; but Captain Sigurd is leading it."

"One of my patients is on her way over to ask you to take her along on this jaunt—"

"Jaunt?" Jim's low voice had lifted eyebrows.

"Exactly. I know that cave exploration is a risky sport. I explained this to Miss Nason. She's a bright youngster, and she admitted it wasn't wise for her to go, but—"

"I'm taking only experienced 'spelunkers,'" Jim cut in.

Dr. Dunn agreed smoothly:

"Who will be an asset. Whereas a young woman who's green at the business, and prone to claustrophobia, would be a calamity. You wouldn't want to have a shrieking maniac on your hands."

"Nor would I want to see anybody driven out of her mind," Jim retorted. "I won't take her along."

"Naturally. She was going straight over to your office from here, so I'll hang up now. She's a fine girl. Let her down easy, won't you?"

"I will. But why didn't you really stop her? For even letting her *try* to go into a cave, you should lose your license. Good-by!"

He slammed the phone down; then grinned sheepishly at the shocked look on Miss Wayne's face.

"I hate phonies," he said defensively.

"In business, you've got to use tact."

"I did! What I really wanted to say would've singed his ears."

"Let me handle Miss Nason when she comes."

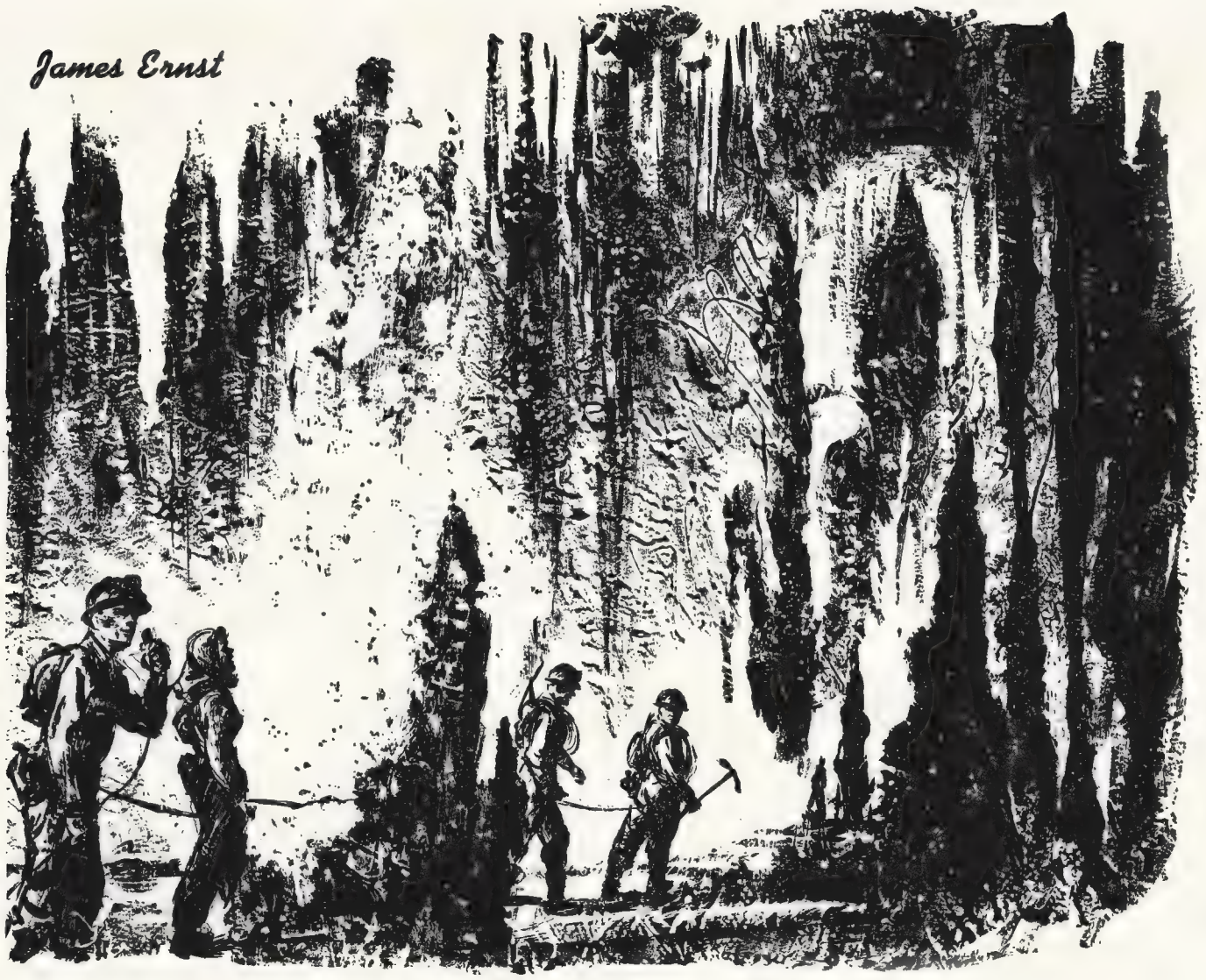
"No. I'll stay and see her. I don't think a tactful brush-off will work. She sounds determined, from what the doc says. Cleland'll have to forgive me."

Five minutes later Jim's secretary came into his inner office and told him: "She's here." She added meaningly: "With Mr. Speare."

Jim frowned in surprise.

"Using a little influence, huh? Send 'em in."

Danny Speare was the radio commentator who would accompany the exploring party into Holcomb Cave. Miss Nason had evidently enlisted his aid. Jim's lips firmed angrily. Speare should know better than to want to take underground a person prone to morbid fear of closed spaces. Maybe Speare didn't know?



of DARKNESS

They entered, and Jim rose to meet them, his irritation and concern frank upon his strong face. Speare didn't seem to notice, but the girl was instantly aware, and she tautened perceptibly.

"Hello, Braden!" Speare said, with a heartiness that annoyed Jim. He told himself, as Speare introduced the girl, that radio was show business, and show people said "pal" and "darling" as a sort of protective coloration that was casual and meaningless. "Braden, Miss Nason is my fiancée," Speare added.

SHE WAS A SMALL GIRL, smartly dressed in gray that wasn't sober but made alive by a tiny hat, beads, purse and shoes of Chinese red. She had an exciting figure and a graceful, vital walk; her fingers met Jim's in a firm clasp, and her gaze was grave and direct. She wasn't making any effort at phony charm, and for that he gave her instant credit. She was more than ordinarily pretty, he reflected. Her hair was vividly smooth and black, and her clear skin very fair. Then he realized that he was staring, and he flushed and turned back to his desk as he asked them to sit down.

"Braden, Mary wants to make the cave trip with us." She added: "I want very much to go along."

Her low voice was very earnest. Jim felt on the defensive, as if his refusal was going to be unfair.

"I'm sorry, Miss Nason. The party's at full strength."

"Just one more person won't matter," Speare insisted.

Jim looked angrily at him. Danny Speare was Jim's own age, but looked five years younger. He was tall, but lanky, narrow of shoulders. He had a mane of wavy yellow hair and features so handsomely regular that they were almost effeminate. His voice, however, had a ringing masculinity that was very effective over a microphone, and made him a popular announcer. Like most theatrical folk, he had an ingratiating smile and easy manners, and he wore slacks and tweedy sport jackets and went hatless.

He looked like a simple, attractive fellow who lazily got along on his charm; but Jim did not underestimate him. Jim had originally planned to explore Mitchell Cavern, out in the Mojave Desert; but Speare had suggested Holcomb Cave. Jim had said no. Nevertheless, a little later, the others of his party had voted that they go to Holcomb Cave. Jim realized that Speare had done some subtle maneuvering. For that matter, Danny Speare was not Jim's original choice of commentators to accompany the party. He'd asked the Pacific Broadcasting Company for another man, and thought it was so decided. But Danny Speare had been sent to him. Speare had a way of getting what he wanted, Jim concluded.

JIM FOUND HIMSELF ON EDGE when with Speare. Why the man grated on his nerves Jim could not say exactly. Mostly it was a sense of being handled by Speare. It was the ironic knowingness he sometimes caught in Speare's glance; it was the way Speare smiled, one corner of his expressive mouth drooping in amiable cynicism—as if Speare, even while he managed people, despised them for being suckers. Dealing with the man gave Jim a helpless feeling of working clumsily in the dark.

So his voice was curt as he said: "One more person is one more big responsibility."

"Please don't make a snap decision about me." Miss Nason begged.

"You should know this trip would be too much for you," he retorted.

"I'm physically up to it. I'm a dancer. I'm dancing at the Moroso now. I'd keep up with the men in your party."

"You need more than endurance."

"Meaning guts, I suppose?" Her brown eyes flashed. "Mr. Braden, if a mere girl went on your trip, and made a mere jaunt of it, you men would look a lot less heroic, wouldn't you?"

Flushing, he snapped: "It's not a matter of heroics at all!"

"What *is* it a matter of?"

"Playing safe. A woman might be a burden."

"No man, of course, ever breaks a leg or flies off in panic?"

"Look. I'm just not taking you. Is that clear?"

"You mean that you have no reason for rejecting me except that you've taken a blind dislike to me, and—"

"Sure!" he exploded. "I'm a man of violent prejudice! I've got no tact, and I've got no manners. But the answer still—is—*no!*"

"Look," Danny Speare cut in, "there's no use for you two getting so red-headed about this. Braden, I'd consider it a big personal favor if you'd stretch a point and let her go. Won't you?"

"I have reasons to go," Mary said tautly. "I didn't want to go into them at length, but—"

"Your personal affairs are none of my business," Jim interrupted, and stood up. "Sorry to be abrupt, but I'm very busy."

Mary Nason's lovely face was bleak with frustration. She rose to go without further protest. But at the door she paused, and said quietly: "I hadn't thought, before, what an imposition this may have been. I'm sorry, Mr. Braden."

She's a damned nice girl, Jim thought as they left. A blind dislike of her? Maybe it was his hard luck that he *didn't* feel that way about her. She was Danny Speare's girl. The lucky stiff!

"Mr. Braden!" his secretary reminded him, tartly. "You've got to rush over to see Cleland!"

Jim hurried to the offices of the Seaboard Power Company.

Gaunt little Pete Cleland gave him a warm, "Hi, Jim!" and introduced him to the power company officials. "Mr. McCann's our hydro engineer; De Lacey's our construction man; and Blake, you already know. Did you bring an estimate on the tunnel job?"

Cleland's secretary had come in and seated herself in back, a pad on her knee and pencil in her fingers. She had dark hair, but it wasn't as lustrous as Mary Nason's, and her legs weren't as shapely as Mary's. With an effort Jim brought himself back to business.

"To build a tunnel from Bassett Lake under Mt. Lowman and through Argos Range would cost you two and a half million dollars."

"That's a lot less—"

"Than Ames and McKistry figured, I suppose? They don't know that you'd hit a wide belt of soft limestone to cut through."

"How do you know it?" McCann asked.

"I've seen the inside of Argos Range. McKistry hasn't."

Cleland asked: "Jim, will you supervise building that tunnel?"

"No. It would be a waste."

"Of what?" De Laccy demanded.

"Of two million, five hundred thousand dollars."

That made them sit up in startled surprise.

McCann looked at Cleland, frowning; and Cleland said, emphatically: "I'd back Jim Braden with everything I've got. Jim, what's wrong with the tunnel idea?"

"You don't need it. What you do need is Condor Lake."

"Why?"

"No use tapping Bassett Lake. It's already tapped. It drains down through Argos Range into Condor Lake."

"You sure of that?" McCann asked.

"Positive. I've dumped fluorescein coloring matter into Bassett Lake, and found it coming out below into Condor Lake. I double-checked. I located the outlet of the underground stream and crawled into it, and worked up into the range for a mile and a quarter."

"So there's a tunnel there already!"

"No. Just the underground course which the stream has eroded for itself through the rock through a limestone cave system, and down through a thousand-foot chimney. Some places I had to crawl, with the ceiling gouging my back. Other places I had to swim underwater for almost a hundred yards. But anyway, I made the tests; and I found that the bulk of the water flow is from Bassett Lake. You can bank on it."

McCann breathed, aghast: "You crawled in there *alone?*"

"That's why," Cleland broke in, "I insisted that we consult Jim Braden. There are older hydro engineers," he chuckled, "but none who get right down into bedrock the way Jim does. Look, Jim, we're going to build a new power-house on Pine Flat. We'll set up eight impulse turbines with a two-hundred-thousand kilowatt capacity. Can we pipe that water from Condor Lake to Pine Flat?"

"You can. And you'd have a head of two thousand feet."

"Do the job for us, will you, Jim?"

"I'll want eighteen thousand dollars a year, and a two-year contract."

"You're hired!" Cleland said.

IT WAS ALMOST FIVE O'CLOCK when Jim got back to his own office. He sailed his hat at the rack and whooped; and Miss Wayne looked at him, and whooped genteelly too.

"So you landed the contract, Mr. Braden!" Her eyes glowed. "That's certainly fine. Oh, say! That Dr. Dunn is on the line. He's been calling all afternoon. You want to talk to him?"

"Why not?" Jim scooped up the phone. . . . "Braden talking."

The Doctor's voice sounded embarrassed as he said: "Mr. Braden, this morning I called you about Miss Mary Nason."

"You did. And she's not going on the cave trip."

"I—I'm afraid I wasn't strictly ethical in the matter. You see, I don't know of *my own knowledge* that Miss Nason is prone to claustrophobia."

"What do you mean?"

"I phoned you at the request of an old patient. He assured me that it would be dangerous for Mary Nason to make a trip underground. In fact, he seemed quite worked up over the danger."

"Who?" Jim demanded. "Who's the patient?"

"Her fiancé, and that's why it seemed so serious to me."

"You mean *Danny Speare?*" Jim burst out.

"Yes. You know him?"

"I know him. I'm glad you called me back, Doctor."

"I thought it best to explain, because you did seem to think me remiss in my professional duties, this morning."

"Thanks, Doctor. I appreciate it."

Jim hung up, frowning in perplexity and resentment.

Obviously, Danny Speare wanted Mary to think that he was *helping* her to go on the cave trip, while actually he was spiking her chances. Why? And if it was important to Mary to make the trip, why was it important to Speare that she should *not* make the trip?

Jim's lean face hardened. Danny was putting something over on the girl. *Damned if he's going to use me in his finagling! If Mary Nason wants to go on this trip tomorrow, she can go. I'll go see her, and tell her so!* Abruptly Jim grinned to himself. Sure, he wanted to nail down any foxy deal that Speare was putting over the girl. But, more than that, he liked Mary Nason, and he wanted her along on the trip!

He strode down Olive Street, to the Moroso Theater. He found the doors in the lobby unlocked, and went in.

A rehearsal was in progress. Jim took a seat. The theater was unlit, and dark, but lights glared on a bare stage full of movement. Girls, dancing. He saw Mary, then. She wasn't in the chorus, but stood out in front of the group; and when she called out, the pianist stopped playing and the girls relaxed attentively to hear her. She was directing the rehearsal.

She picked up a script, and put on heavy tortoise shell glasses as she studied the pages. The tilted frames gave her an intellectual look that contrasted oddly with the brief play-suit she was wearing. They were a lithe, shapely bunch of young women; but Mary seemed to rob the others of color.

She put the script and glasses on a chair, and spoke crisply to the group.

"Now we'll work on the carnival number. It's Saturday night in a small Midwest town, and everybody's gone out to the tent-show, and they're strolling down the midway, taking in the sights."

SHE SHOWED THEM SOME of the steps. They tried it. She improvised and embroidered on the general outline. She was good, Jim realized. Very good. Not just at dancing, but at pantomime. She was acting. At first he was watching her shapely legs; they were not bunchy with muscles, but graciously supple and young. Then, he realized, he was watching her face and hands. She was telling a story, painting a picture, with such vividly expressive mimicry.

A country yokel, strolling down the midway, eyes agog and jaw agape; superior city visitors, looking down their noses; the barker, raucous and flamboyant in voiceless gesture; the prizefighter, flexing his biceps and popping his triceps—and the lunge and pivot of the fight, the haymaker and count of nine; and the hootch dancer—Mary's satiric bumps and grinds got a yell of delight from the onlookers that became silent, bright-eyed respect as she refined the dance, as she wove into it the sinuous calm pleasure of Polynesia and the elegant formalized storytelling of Siamese temple dancers.

Jim relaxed with a sigh when she ended, and wished that she would keep on. But she said: "That's the idea, but without so much trimming. All right, kids, let's see what you can do."

He thought about Mary Nason as the rehearsal drummed on to its finish, and he wondered why it was so important to her to make the trip into Holcomb Cave. She obviously wasn't a person of flighty whims; she had sense and character as well as ability, and if she pleaded for a chance to explore the cave, she had reasons so urgent that they made her swallow her pride and beg.

He went to meet her as the girls left the stage, and stepped into her way, saying: "Still want to go cave-crawling, Miss Nason?"

She started in surprise. Color warmed her cheeks as she recognized him. She had a good lively temper, he reflected.

"Yes. Have things changed so that you can take me?"

Temper, maybe, but control too. And *tact*, he told himself.

"My mind's changed. You come along with Speare tomorrow."

The tautness went out of her in relief that was like a flood of sudden well-being; and she smiled at him, her eyes crinkling and her cheeks dimpling, her whole face becoming radiant.

"If you knew how much it means to me!"

Jim asked:

"Are you looking for something in the cave?"

"Yes. It—it's a very personal thing. Maybe, later, we can talk about it. Thanks, Mr. Braden. Thanks so much!"

He smiled down at her; and he was still smiling as he strode out of the theater. But his rugged face turned somber as he reminded himself: *She's Danny Speare's girl.* And he thought further: *If she can respect the guy, then he's not just a scheming finagler. Ah, damn him, anyhow!*

NEXT MORNING Jim drove to Holcomb Ranch, some miles north of the city. The ranch lay in a grassy basin shaded with live-oaks, at the base of the sheer upthrust of Holcomb Peak. From the foot of the mountain emerged an underground stream which formed a wide, placid pool which mirrored thunderheads in the sky above.

Jim saw that the others of his party had arrived and were waiting beside the pool. There was a P.B.C. broadcasting truck parked near the arch in the mountain wall from which the stream emerged.

Captain Sigurd called to Jim as he got out of his car. "You're just in time, Jim!"

And Danny Speare said: "We're going on the air at ten sharp." He hesitated, stepped closer to Jim and said, in a lower tone; "Thanks for letting Miss Nason come along with us."

Jim merely nodded, and he nodded to Sigurd, to Professor Carson and to Mary. He noticed that she was wearing a sweater and ski pants and sturdy ski shoes, and a bright kerchief about her dark hair, and looked very young in the get-up.

"You look like a kid of sixteen," he told her, smiling. "A precocious sixteen," he murmured, looking again at the sweater.

She heard him, and she laughed; but the merriment faded so quickly from her face that he realized she was tense and nervous.

Some of that same tension was in Danny Speare's cultivated voice as he called: "Everybody group around the mike now, will you, please? We're going on the air in a couple minutes. I'll introduce you all, and ask a few questions, and then we'll start on our hike inside."

The technician in the big sound-truck twisted a knob, and a loudspeaker's low muttering became a blare. Danny Speare, notepaper lifted in his hand, watched the man seated at the control panel.

"You ignorant amateurs!" Jim exploded. "I said you're not going."

"So now we take you to Holcomb Cave for a fascinating trip of exploration underground with a Pacific Broadcasting Company's special events crew. Come in, Danny Speare!"

The man in the truck nodded and gestured sharply, and Speare launched into his speech, talking into the portable mike he held before him, exaggerating emphasis a bit, rounding his words out for an unseen audience.

"This is Danny Speare, now! Here we are, friends, at the entrance of Holcomb Cave in California, all ready to start our trip into the mountain. But first, I'm going to present Captain Hugh Sigurd, leader of this group of cave fans who will explore the unknown and mysterious labyrinth of galleries and chambers under Holcomb Peak. Captain Sigurd, what's the name of your organization?"

"We're the National Speleological Society."

"Is it anything like the National Geographic Society?"

"In a way. The National Geographic people explore far-off places on top of the ground. We explore underground."

"So that's what speleologists do!"

"Yes. We call ourselves 'spelunkers,' though."

"Captain, why are you exploring Holcomb Cave?"

"The War Department has asked our Society to make a survey of unknown caves throughout the country with a view to finding fifty thousand square feet of additional cave space immediately. In the event of a war fought with atomic bombs, obviously large underground facilities would be vital."

"As bomb shelters?"

"And control centers and factory sites and storehouses."

"Thank you, Captain Sigurd. And now, friends, let me describe this crew of 'spelunkers' to you. Exploring underground is, evidently, underground mountain climbing. It's a serious business that requires a high order of courage. You'd realized that if you saw this party's equipment. There are three man and a young woman in the group, besides myself. We men are wearing flannel shirts and jeans and heavy shoes, and hard hats fitted with carbide lights. We're carrying safety ropes and miners' picks and crampons, and rubber waders that come up under our armpits, as well.

"The leader of our group, Captain Sigurd, is a stocky, muscular man of forty with the yellow hair and ice-blue eyes of Viking ancestors. Are you in the infantry, Captain?"

"Aviation engineers. I build landing fields."

"Thanks, Captain. Now, the senior member of our group," Danny Speare went on, "is Dr. Neil Carson. He's a tall, pleasant-faced, graying man with a sardonic twinkle in his eye, who looks mighty keen and fit. Are you a surgeon, Dr. Carson?"

"In a sense. A plastic surgeon of the intellect. I cut out tumors of illiteracy, and make surface grafts of culture, not too successfully. I teach literature at Pomona College."

"Thank you, Dr. Carson. Now, friends, let me present our girl 'spelunker,' Miss Mary Nason. A good many of you have seen Mary dancing on the stage. She is currently slated to star in the new revue, 'Carnival Night,' that is going to New York next month. Mary's not a big girl, but I suspect she'll out-walk the rest of us. She has black hair and brown eyes, and a thousand-kilowatt smile.

"Now, friends, I want to present Mr. Jim Braden, who planned this trip. Mr. Braden is an outstanding hydro-electrical engineer who is an authority upon cave system and underground drainage. Mr. Braden, do you think that the War Department will be able to locate as much space underground as it has asked for?"

"Oh, yes, and much more," Jim answered. "All our caves aren't known, because many of them don't open onto the surface of the ground at all. We'll use geophysical devices to find them."

Danny Speare asked a couple more obvious questions; and as Jim answered, his first impression of uneasiness in Speare heightened. There was a corded quivering about Speare's lips, a perceptible *tic* in his left eyelid. He was under intense strain. It made Jim wonder. . . . Speare had tried to keep Mary from making this trip. Mary was hunting for something in the cave. Was Speare afraid that she might actually *find* it?

"NOW, FRIENDS," SPEARE SAID into the mike, "we're getting ready. We're lighting our carbide lights and fastening them to our hard hats. Captain Sigurd is linking us all together with the safety ropes, and is making sure that each of us has his first-aid kit, his pack of food and flask of water and a flashlight for emergency.

"Captain Sigurd has explained to us that this underground stream presents a special problem for 'spelunkers.' You see, when Holcomb Creek is swollen with spring rains, you can't get very far into the cave. Even just one rainstorm up behind the range, back in the rich vineyards and orange groves of Holcomb Valley, would in a few hours make a raging torrent of the creek, and bloat it up so that it fills the cave passageway, closing the tunnel up tight. But Captain Sigurd assures us that he and Braden

have checked with the Weather Bureau. There'll be no rain for the next three days. Only hot, dry weather. Increasingly hot, dry weather. And that is our assurance of safety. Well, now we start!"

With Sigurd leading, they filed into the cave.

Danny Speare talked on into the mike he carried: "At first you have an awful feeling of a huge mountain poised dangerously over your head. The tunnel is arched, and it's of gray-white marble. Our lights seem to push back the darkness. Our ears ring with noise. Up ahead of us is a waterfall, and it fills the cave with its whoop and holler. . . . Now the roof of our passageway seems lined with winged mice. Bats, of course. And as we walk along, our shadows lurch and stagger across the white walls like shady characters losing a week-end. . . .

"We're entering a large chamber now. The roof arches up, and the walls spread far apart, and from the ceiling hang stone icicles, and from the floor on both sides of the creek lift white bulges. Stalactites, and stalagmites. Here and there a stalactite coming down from the roof meets a stalagmite bulging up from the floor, and they form a column. Lots of 'em! And the walls are hung with tapestries, some waxy white and some tawny, and they seem to ripple like silk in a breeze, only there is no breeze, and they are made of onyx and alabaster and marble.

"Here and there are niches in the walls, with little fat figures standing in them like Billikens, like fat-paunched buddhas, like dropsical cross-eyed godlets of some race of gnomes. This is an eerie place—of ghosts in stone, of frozen nightmares, of ghouls and grimalkins. It weaves a sort of primitive spell upon you."

WITH MOUNTING SURPRISE AND RESPECT Jim listened to Danny Speare. *Why, he's good!* Jim realized. *He's not just glib. There's appreciation in his words. He knows caves. He likes caves. He's no amateur. I bet he's a veteran spelunker! He's likely been in this cave before.*

"We've crossed the domed cavern," Danny Speare was saying, "and we're at the waterfall. It's a rapids, really. The cave seems to thunder and throb with the racket the water's making. And here we start our mountain-climbing. The trail leads up alongside the rapids on a thin ledge that looks too steep and slick for a goat. But Captain Sigurd is leading, and we follow.

"Spray wets our faces, and wind whips our lights. Everybody is quiet, keeping the safety rope tight and watching where he puts his feet. Overhead, the roof is a midnight sky stippled with stars that are stalactites tipped with dropping water. And here the boom of the rapids drowns out all effort at talking."

He quit speaking until they reached the top of the falls. He described another white corridor—that ended in a wall which was solid except for the opening of a low passage for the creek, like a storm drain or penstock. Here Sigurd halted the group.

Self-consciously, for the mike was listening, the stocky officer addressed the group: "Ahead of us is the Siphon. We're now some twelve hundred feet into the mountain, which, to my knowledge, is as far as this cave has ever been explored. To go on, we must wade through the narrow tube which siphons Holcomb Creek into this corridor. During the rainy season this siphon is solid with water, and passing through it is impossible. But now the creek is just three and a half feet deep. It's my belief that the siphon drains a series of giant caverns up behind it. We're going to find them. But before we go on, I want to say that as leader of this party, I'm responsible for you all. You are each of you going to obey such orders as I find it necessary to give—or I want you to turn back right now. And if any of you are feeling touches of distress or panic, start back at once. It won't be cowardice: it'll be good sense."

Jim grimaced to himself. Funny what a microphone can do to you. Sigurd was a competent, modest chap without a bit of pretense. But knowing that his words were being broadcast made him sound self-consciously noble.

"Thank you, Captain Sigurd," Danny Speare said. "Friends, this is as far as it's feasible to drag our microphone. So here we'll leave it, and here we plunge into the siphon. How far we'll have to wade the current, we don't know; and what sort of underground marvels we'll find ahead, we can't even guess. But barring a cloudburst in the valleys above that'll send water sluicing down through the siphon and make a death-trap of it, we'll report to you in full *tonight.* We hope to be back at this microphone by ten P.M. So tune in, at that time. Until then, this is Operation Styx, returning you to Pacific Broadcasting Studios in Hollywood!"

They drew on their waders Sigurd assigned places to everyone. He put Professor Carson behind him, then the radio man, then Mary, with Jim at the end of the line.

Mary seemed to be doing all right, he reflected. No sign of suffocation from her, so far. And Danny Speare—*Speare, Speare.* Jim echoed to himself. *Seems to me I do connect the name with something I read, in the news. Must've been when I was overseas.*

"Captain Sigurd!" Dr. Carson called. "Are we entering caves that've never been seen or named before?"

"I think so."

"Captain, I have a horror of sickly-sweet place names that people tag on natural wonders. Like Bridal Veil Falls and Elfin Ramble and Serena's Arbor. Let's put labels on our discoveries that won't make a mature man retch whenever he hears them."

"Oh, hell!" Sigurd muttered. "Everybody keep the safety rope taut!" he commanded, and led off.

Jim grinned. He couldn't have been less tactful himself. But scholarly Dr. Carson was too even-tempered to take offense; and anyway, he was a toughened campaigner for sense and restraint in place names.

Wading into the stream, Sigurd entered the tunnel, and the column filed in after him. Jim heard Mary catch a sharp breath, and he watched her closely. He knew what she was feeling. He knew how the low roof and walls must seem to swoop in upon her with a vividness that made her breath knot in her throat, for the conduit was lined with gleaming white flowstone that reflected the carbide lights dazzlingly.

"Makes you feel like Jonah," he told her, "walking right into the whale's stomach. Wonder if that whale ever hiccuped?"

Mary laughed, and he knew she relaxed a bit.

THEY TRUDGED ON, LEANING AGAINST the strong current. Jim counted paces. A hundred yards on through the tube, they reached a shallow spot, where the bottom lifted, and the ceiling opened in a slot that seemed roofless. Beyond, however, the ceiling lowered sharply and they stooped until the chill water almost reached the tops of their waders.

Abruptly they entered a large chamber. Captain Sigurd climbed up out of the water channel, and they all followed. Sigurd flicked on a flashlight. It had a prefocused bulb that shot a narrow beam for several hundred feet. He played it upon a lofty ceiling, then turned it across the room. The beam was lost in darkness without touching the far wall at all.

"This cave's big enough for an armory," Jim said.

"This is what the War Department wants," Sigurd agreed.

"Could the stream be dammed, or diverted, so that the siphon could be used all year as an entrance?" Mary asked.

"We can't say, until we explore farther," Jim said.

Sigurd led the file alongside the nearby wall, which was hung with blankets of waxy white flowstone, with drapes of alabaster striated like agate with shades of brown that gave it a woody grain. Here and there cascades of snowy

Abruptly Carson's feet slipped. Jim yelled: "Flat on your back."

calcite stairstepped up to galleries that arched back into dark passageways. Sigurd stopped beside a niche like a font.

"Look."

Within a basin of travertine they saw small, gleaming white stones as perfect of form as fine gems.

"Cave pearls," Sigurd said.

"What's this?" Dr. Carson asked, sticking his finger into a little pool on a bench beyond, and lifting his finger up dripping white.

"Moon milk."

"Not really!" Mary breathed.

Jim chuckled, and said: "Mary, it's calcite that's too full of moisture to have solidified."

She managed a shaky smile; and he felt an impulse to put his arm around her. He knew the tension, on the edge of panic, that sometimes gripped even old spelunkers, and Mary was not a veteran. This eerie world under the earth could weigh upon you with an intangible menace that kept your heart pounding and your nerves jumpy and a scream poised at the back of your throat.

Captain Sigurd counted paces across the cave, to the far wall where the creek filtered out of a pile of boulders.

"The room is five hundred and fifty feet long, and a third as wide."

"What use'll it be to the War Department?" Dr. Carson asked.

"While the atomic bombs pop off outside," Jim mused ruefully, "down here we can hold sulky races and revival meetings."

"We'll decentralize our cities," Mary said. "We'll rebuild them alongside caverns. But what will living underground *do* to us? Will we have mass neuroses?"

"We'll adapt," Dr. Carson said. "We'll put evolution into reverse. Our eyes will atrophy, and we'll grow hair all over our bodies again, with the specialized function of antennae—"

"Hogwash," Captain Sigurd cut in. "Sunday supplement stuff."

"Not at all. In some thousand generations—"

"Oh, I'm worried," Sigurd said.

"Anyway," Danny Speare said, "*we've* got the atomic bomb and nobody else."

"Which is a comfort, lad," Dr. Carson said, "until I recall that we had the airplane first. And the submarine."

"In time," Jim said, "other countries are bound to have the bomb. There's no monopoly on scientific brains."

"That's why we're getting ready," Sigurd answered.

"Tenements underground," Mary said. "Our kids will turn into albinos."

"Oh, come, Miss Nason," Sigurd snorted. "We'll light everything with quartz lamps, and dose everybody with vitamins. I dare say the kids'll enjoy cave life."

"Indeed yes," Dr. Carson seconded with mild irony. "A cool, even climate. No prickly heat, and no chilblains—"

"Mushrooms for the kiddies to pick," Jim added. "Bats to shoot with BB guns. Scalloped bats in mushroom sauce, with goblets of moon milk. Lord, the darlings'll thrive on it!"

"No rain, no wind, no ragweed pollen."

"And no sun, no moon, no stars!" Mary retorted, close to tears. "Why keep children alive at all?"

"Caves will be used in emergency," Sigurd said stiffly.

"But when won't it be a state of emergency?" she cried.

"Mary's right," Jim said soberly. "Rockets will travel with the speed of sound. Radar warnings wouldn't give us much time. We'd have to stick to our holes like gophers."

"The earth," Dr. Carson murmured, "shall inherit the meek."

"Then let's not be meek!" Mary said.

Jim stepped close and put his arm about her shoulders.

"Save all that steam pressure for climbing," he told her.

She colored, and laughed lightly at her own vehemence.

Danny Speare glared at Jim. Jim grinned back at him, and took a little longer than necessary to remove his arm from around Mary.

Chapter Two

CAPTAIN SIGURD chopped steps up one of the alabaster cascades, and the group filed after him up onto a balcony. He led into a tunnel, then, that became a winding crevice through which they had to sidle for a hundred yards, squeezing past knobs and shoulders of snowy calcite. Out of it they emerged into a dome-shaped room that startled them, for it seemed plastered with gems.

"Helictites," Jim said.

The floor was a pale, unearthly garden of flowers of just one brilliant hue: the white fire of diamonds. And the delicate blossoms and the dainty filigree of foliage draped the walls and hung from the dome in massed myriads, shimmering and sparkling in the light. All of it, all the fragile petals and twining stalks, were motionless crystals of gypsum.

"Here we start climbing again," Captain Sigurd said. "Let's refill our carbide lights."

He opened a canister he carried, and they spilled new charges of the grayish, gravelly chemical into the lamp bases.

Starting on again, Sigurd led through a tunnel that seemed a mere slot in the mountain, out into a corridor that was a forest of columns like ghostly birch trees. From it they emerged into another giant chamber.

"Watch the floor!" Sigurd warned.

He paced off the length of the huge room, stepping carefully over a floor that was a thin layer of slippery stalagmite over soft clay. The flowstone broke under their feet with a resounding crackle. Moreover the room was cut by deep crevasses murmurous with the wailing of water running far below.

"We're getting results," Sigurd remarked. "You could hide a city in this cave system."

"Only reptiles and rodents live naturally in the ground," Dr. Carson said. "Is mankind reverting to reptiles and rodents?"

"Do you have to look at the dark side?" Sigurd demanded.

"When the light goes out of the world, Captain, what other side is there?"

They filed out of the big chamber into a high, narrow crevice, following along a ledge that cut across a steep slope of water-burnished flowstone that plunged away so deeply that their lights could not reach bottom. Far below, they could hear the sibilant rush of water. Jim, at the end of the line, leaned back on the rope to tauten it and give support to the others.

ABRUPTLY DR. CARSON'S FEET slipped out from under him, and he fell heavily in a sliding plunge down into the crevasse. His bulk pulled Captain Sigurd down after him. Mary screamed. Jim flung himself back and locked his arms around a bulge of stalagmite, and he yelled: "Flat on your back, Speare!"

The shock came through the rope. Danny Speare almost went off his feet, and Mary was pulled to her knees; but Jim's arms held around that knob. Sigurd caught himself; Sigurd had twisted onto his back; and with knees up, feet and palms flat onto the rock, he checked his descent. Between him and Danny Speare the dangling figure of Dr. Carson hung at the point of the V rope.

Sigurd called: "Carson! You hurt?"

Dr. Carson did not answer.

"Crawl back up, Sigurd," Jim ordered calmly.

Sigurd crabbed backward up the slope, pulling against the weight of the senseless man below. Sweat popped onto Sigurd's broad face, and his panting breath was hoarse in the straining quiet.

Jim waited until Sigurd was securely on the ledge. Jim said, "Root in tight, everybody," and ran past Mary, to Danny Speare's side. Bending, Jim grasped the rope below Speare, and hauled in. Sigurd pulled too; and between them they drew Dr. Carson back up to the narrow ledge.

The side of the professor's face was bruised and lacerated. He stirred as they stretched him out on his back, and abruptly tried to sit up.

"Easy, Doc," Jim said soothingly. "You had a fall."

"I m-must've hit my head," Carson murmured.

"Sure, probably feels as if it had a tomahawk buried in it. Just catch your breath, now. We've got lots of time."

Captain Sigurd looked at Jim, and formed the word *"Concussion?"* with his lips. Jim shrugged: *"Don't know."*

"Guess we might as well start home," Jim said.

Mary protested with an aghast: "Oh, no! Not yet!"

"Carson, think you can keep going?" Jim asked.

"The spirit is willing, and if the weak flesh folds up, I'll just sit and wait for you. Let's start on again."

They helped him to his feet, and reformed their line. And then Captain Sigurd blurted a disgusted oath.

"That can of carbide! Damn it, I lost it when I fell!"

"It must've slid to the bottom," Jim said. "It's gone."

"But without carbide we're limited to what's left in our lamps. That cuts our time in here to just a couple hours more."

"Maybe we *had* better start back," Jim said thoughtfully.

"Not yet!" Mary insisted again. "Danny! Tell them—"

"We've got flashlights for reserve," Danny Speare said. "Let's keep going awhile."

There had been panicky urgency in Mary's voice; and Jim realized: *They haven't found what they came hunting for.*

He said: "All right, we'll go a little farther."

They continued on, but for Carson's benefit Sigurd set a slow pace. They crossed the steep slope and entered a narrow, rising tunnel that led them on and on.

Abruptly they emerged into a large room. Everyone paused, for a respite. Jim noticed that it was a broad, low-ceilinged room with an uneven floor and walls of smooth light-gray rock.

"*Look at that!*" Captain Sigurd gasped.

"What is it?" Mary cried.

Then Jim had seen it—and his hands were shaking as he suddenly started forward, and his voice shook as he said: "We've made a find. Come on!"

They all surged forward toward the wall; and it was Dr. Carson who blurted, "As I live and breathe!" and who seemed beside himself with wonder.

On the wall were pictographs—amazingly fine paintings, in deep red and umber, of a bison, of tiny horses, of deer crossing a stream, of a stag rearing on hind legs and brandishing great horns affixed to the head of a man.

"And look here, on the floor," Dr. Carson exclaimed. "Clay sculpture. Bisons. Crumbling, but unmistakable. We've stumbled onto a Cave of the Sorcerers!"

"Indian medicine men?" Jim said.

"Yes, that's why these things are so far back inside. They're not for display. They're sympathetic magic, these drawings and figures. They're prayers, in a sense. They're part of primitive rites put on by the witch-doctors!"

"Cave of the Sorcerers," Jim repeated, and laughed. "Dr. Carson, is that the best you can do?"

"It *is* hackneyed," Carson admitted. "But, lad, I'm in a daze! Where in America has a white man ever before looked upon clay sculpturing to rank in skill and perhaps in age with Cro-Magnon modelings, and upon painted engravings of horses and deer of an antiquity going back to late Paleolithic times? And a bison—isn't he a beauty? Notice the vibrant red, and the deep umber, still vivid! And the faithful modeling of the small head and the strength of chest and shoulders. Why, it's of quality to rank with the best Magdalenian paintings!"

"You realize what a big thing this is?" Captain Sigurd said breathlessly. "This is a hell of a beautiful cave to begin with. But with a room full of cavemen magic and Indian paintings—man, oh, man! You realize how many people pay a buck or two every year to visit Mammoth Cave, or Carlsbad Caverns, or even the Oregon Caves? This cave'll draw a damn' sight more people, and—"

IT WAS THEN THAT MARY'S SCREAM was shrill in the room. She had taken off the safety rope, and wandered aside, peering at the uneven, shadow-splotched floor of the broad cave. Now she stood taut, hand pressed to her mouth, her eyes dark with horror as she stared at the ground before her.

Danny Speare had darted toward her; and Jim sprang after him.

Speare reached her, and dropped to a knee and stooped low. Then Jim reached them, and he saw what Danny

"Jim, I'm scared! But not about being in here."

Speare was bending over, and for an instant shock was a giddy reeling in Jim's brain.

There on the floor lay a body; and it was old in decay, so old that the clothes upon it seemed draped about dust and earth and leather. It was a slight body, small-boned; the suède jacket was of feminine cut, and a kerchief was wrapped about the head. Loose about one wrist now was a wrist-watch on a silver band. The slacks were ski pants of expensive cut. About the throat was a necklace of small Indian conchas, dull now, and pathetic.

"Poor girl," Dr. Carson murmured, his low voice hoarse with pity. "To die all alone in here!"

Jim took Mary's arm.

"Why don't you come over here, Miss Nason?"

"No. Let me look. I've got to look!"

He let her go; he let her alone; for he realized, then, that this was the reason Mary Nason had come into the cave. This was the thing she and Danny Speare had come to find.

JIM STUDIED THE BODY, studied the ground about it. No safety rope, he reflected; no carbide light—just a flashlight. No pack. She should've had a pack. Odd. No visible signs of harm. But of course there wouldn't be, after this long time. So what happened to her? Just got lost in the dark? Starved? Went out of her mind? But where was the rest of her party? She didn't come in here alone! No girl would. Most men wouldn't. . . .

Danny Speare was gingerly going through the pockets of the jacket and slacks. Mary picked up a leather purse, of the type worn by a long strap over the shoulder. Danny Speare took it from her, and together they peered within it.

"Know who she was, Speare?" Jim asked.

"Yes. You'd met her as Bea Ames."

"Bea Ames! Why, she was a spelunker!" Jim exclaimed. "She went on a trip through Torrey Cavern with a gang I led couple years ago. You knew her, Speare?"

"She was my wife."

It was said matter-of-factly, as if everything he felt of grief and loss and bewilderment had long since worn itself out.

"What happened?" Jim demanded quietly.

"We made this trip now, Mary and I, in hope of finding Bea. You see, early last fall, I came in here with Bea and her cousin Dick—Dick Mitchell. We went in a lot farther than this cave. We hit a big room cut by crevasses, and Dick had a bad fall. Twisted a knee so that it swelled up almost big as his thigh, and he got a concussion as well.

"I started carrying him out, but he's a big, heavy man. He was out of his head too, and half the time I was fighting him as well as carrying him. I had to stop and rest often. Our lights were giving out. I told Bea I wasn't going to make it, and she decided to go ahead and bring in a rescue party. She left.

"I waited awhile, then started carrying Dick again. He couldn't help himself at all. Hours passed, and still no help came. I finally made it outside with Dick.

"Bea wasn't there. No sign of her. I got help, and took Dick to a hospital. Then I tried locating Bea. She wasn't home. I couldn't locate her anywhere.

"Next day I came back here with a rescue party. There was just one way I could figure it: she'd got lost inside, when she left me.

"We came in, hunting for her. But we didn't get very far inside. There'd been storms in the basin behind the range, and the water was rising fast. It drove us out. You remember the rains last fall. They closed the cave. We couldn't come in again."

"And outside, you got no word from Bea?" Dr. Carson said.

"That's right. Dick and I both realized that Bea was in here, and—there wasn't any hope for her. I had to wait over the winter, until the stream dwindled enough to allow entrance in here."

"Why didn't you tell us?" Jim demanded. "Why didn't you say why you wanted to come in here?"

"Well, I—oh, what damned difference does it make!"

"Tell them, Danny," Mary insisted.

"Can't you see how the tabloids would've played it up?" Danny Speare grated. "Mary Nason and I are getting married. Only, we *can't*, until we can establish positively that Bea is dead—"

"How about an uncontested divorce?" Dr. Carson asked. "I'm no lawyer, but wouldn't that be possible?"

"Mary didn't like that idea, for one thing. For another—well, Bea inherited quite a lot of money. That money will come to me, as her husband, when her death is established." His voice grew bitter. "Don't you see? The tabloids would smear the thing across their headlines. *'Popular radio announcer and Broadway dancer make cave search for fortune and romance!'* If we find Bea's dead body in here, and identify it, Mary and I can marry, and I inherit Bea's money immediately. Lord, the tabloids would've blown it up into the biggest kind of a hullabaloo. Can you blame me for trying to spare Mary that?"

"No," Jim said soberly, "we can't. But—"

"Oh, we don't ask you to help us carry out the—remains," Speare said. "I'll send a party in for that. All Mary and I want to do is make an identification. It *is* Bea, isn't it, Mary?"

She nodded, her eyes brimming.

"Let's g-get outside, now," she choked. "I want to see daylight again!"

SIGURD LEADING, THEY BACK-TRACKED on their route. They hurried a little, for Mary's and Dr. Carson's carbide lights went out, and the remaining lamps were dwindling in brilliance. They hurried, and they were silent; for thought of that lonely small-boned body lying back in that cave marked with the symbols of primitive rites was a heavy, troubling thing upon their minds.

Sigurd's lamp became dim, and he started using his flashlight. They all were tense now, upon them an imperative sense of time running out. On down into the lowest chamber they filed, to the room where they would have to enter the siphon. It seemed to Jim that the swift rumble of water was louder than before.

"Say, there's water covering the floor!" Sigurd exclaimed.

Alarm was naked in his tone, and Jim felt a wild surge of concern. Mary turned and looked at him, but he grinned reassuringly at her, though his mind leaped ahead to what lay before them.

Captain Sigurd led on across the big chamber toward the upper mouth of the siphon. The stream, when they had entered here before, had run in a shallow trough. Now it was up over the edges of the trough. And the water was deepening, rising to their knees.

"Are we in the right room?" Dr. Carson asked loudly.

Sigurd did not answer. He was turning his flashlight beam onto the wall, searching for the siphon opening.

And a furious, helpless "Damnation!" burst from him. For the stream had risen so high that water covered the siphon mouth.

"What's wrong? What's wrong?" Danny Speare demanded.

"A rainstorm, evidently," Dr. Carson said. "The creek has flooded its bed, and now completely fills the exit tunnel."

"But there hasn't *been* any rain," Sigurd protested. "I tell you, there can't have been. I studied all the forecasts. Everything indicated at least three more days of hot, dry weather!"

"You m-mean we're *stuck* in here?" Danny Speare asked.

"See for yourself. The stream is rising faster than it can drain out, and it's backing up into this chamber."

"But it's utterly impossible!" Sigurd repeated hoarsely. "We're having the hottest, driest weather yet this year!"

And then Jim understood, and heartsick dismay crushed in upon him. They *were* stuck in here. It wasn't anybody's fault; only long study of this cave system could have provided warning.

"You're right, Captain," Jim said heavily. "It isn't rain. There hasn't been any rain. It's this unusually hot weather."

"What d'you mean?"

"Farmers up in Holcomb Valley have had to irrigate extensively. Probably keeping their pumps working thirty-six hours at a stretch. That's what's happened. All up and down Holcomb they've been pumping water into the groves and vineyards—and the seepage and runoff has drained into Holcomb Creek."

"*Is* draining," Dr. Carson corrected tautly. "It's still rising."

"So we're trapped in here!" Danny Speare burst out.

And Dr. Carson demanded: "Sigurd, what're you going to do about it?"

Captain Sigurd just looked at him, too stunned to answer.

Chapter Three

'M afraid," Jim said quietly, "that we're going to have to spend some time in this cave."

They looked at him, their faces pallid in the light from the dwindling lamps, and no one spoke. Only Mary's expressive face betrayed the giddying shock of terror in her. The rest just stared; and his deep concern lashed out in furious impatience toward them. "Are you stricken dumb?" he wanted to yell. "Don't you understand? We're trapped, Buried alive! That water seals us off in here. Don't stand there gawking like cretins. We're in trouble!"

But his essential fairness checked his anger. It's hard to believe in extinction when you're untouched, when you can sigh a long breath into your lungs and shift your weight uneasily on your feet. His companions would understand, soon enough.

"How long'll we be caught in here, Jim?" Mary asked shakily.

"Until the water recedes, and we can walk out the siphon."

"Which may take two days, or two months!" Captain Sigurd said with a savagery that gave his hoarse voice the impact of a yell. "I'm not waiting. I'm going out that siphon. *Now.*"

"I'm a good swimmer," Danny Speare said. "I'll go."

"You're not that good," Jim said. "Nobody is."

"I'm going," Captain Sigurd said stonily. "When I reach the broadcasting truck, I'll have the sound man call for a rescue squad with some Navy Momsen lungs, and—"

"You're not going," Jim snapped, his patience wearing thin. "This siphon is no YMCA pool. There's turbulence in there that would slam you against every rocky blade and knob and spit you out the far end with every bone in your body busted. It's a rock-crusher."

"They're my bones."

Jim made a swift stride forward, and took Sigurd by the front of his heavy shirt. "You ignorant amateurs!" Jim exploded. "I said you're not going. I'll go. I know what to expect. Is that clear? Or do I have to knock it into your head?"

"All right. You go," Sigurd said heavily. "But understand, I don't ask anybody to take risks for me."

Jim stripped off his gear and coat and cap.

"We've got two sixty-foot ropes. Knot them together, Sigurd. I'm tying one end around my waist. You'll watch the way the rope uncoils. At the end of two minutes, haul it back as fast as you can yank it. Rest of you help Sigurd. Either I've made it through the siphon, and I'll have untied the rope—or I'll be at the end of it, needing help. Carson, you've got a waterproof flashlight. Let me have it."

Ready. Jim wasted no time. He looked at Mary, at the others; he said briefly, "See you," and turned and started down into the water flowing in the steep trough.

Mary said, "Be careful, Jim!" and her words gave him a glow of warmth. It lasted but an instant, though, until the savage thrust of the water tore all else from his mind but realization that it was going to be far worse in the siphon than he had foreseen. There was no standing against the rush of current, no walking with it. He gasped a swift, full breath into his lungs, and flung himself headlong into the siphon mouth, diving low toward the bottom.

It was as if he had been seized by a giant comber squeezed into the confines of a storm-drain. His hope had been to keep himself in the middle of the flow; but there was no groove to guide him, and neither vision nor touch could help in the black turmoil of water that whirled and twisted him, that slammed him against the rough floor, and when he pushed off, drove him against one wall, and then against the ceiling, battering him against the rock. A banged elbow sent pain knifing into his shoulder. His thigh hit a knob, and his leg went limp and numb. He was slewed crosswise in the current, and tried desperately to straighten out. His right knee struck, and a gasp of agony burst from his lips, and he strangled with water—and blinding light flashed in his brain, and instantly was drowned in muffling, smothering blackness. . . .

"Watch that rope uncoil!" Dr. Carson exclaimed. "The current is shooting him through the siphon."

"Thirty-one, thirty-two," Mary counted. "Thirty-three—"

"You're scanting the seconds," Danny Speare told her.

I am, I am! I'm counting fast. To give Jim a little margin!

"—thirty-nine, forty, forty-one—"

Of a sudden her breath caught in her throat; and for an instant she could not speak, she could only point at the rope. Then she gasped:

"It's stopped uncoiling! And he's not halfway through!"

"He's caught. He's hung up!" Captain Sigurd said.

He bent, he snatched up the rope. Dr. Carson grabbed hold, too, then Danny Speare. They hauled in frantically. It was surprisingly hard to pull against the current,

and they could feel a jolting impact come through the strands.

Then Jim was out of the siphon, sprawled grotesque and inert in the water before them. Captain Sigurd leaped into the stream, and lifted Jim's long body up onto the bank.

Mary bent over Jim, wild alarm in her mind. Jim's scalp was laid open, and blood streaked from it, and there was no life in his face. She put her hand over his heart; and relief surged warmly through her.

"Lord, what a battering he took!" Danny Speare breathed.

"Let's get him back to a dry spot," Mary urged.

Jim stirred as they lifted him, and they waited while he coughed stranglingly, water coming from his nose and mouth. It eased, presently, and they carried him up the rising floor to a dry level at the back of the chamber. Sigurd drew off Jim's sodden shirt and singlet and put his own khaki jacket on Jim.

Sigurd opened a first-aid packet. Mary said, "I've had some training. Let me—" And she deftly bandaged the gash in his scalp. Jim groaned as she worked.

"Give him a syrette of morphine?" Sigurd suggested.

But Jim himself murmured: "No. I'm dopey enough."

"How're you feeling, Jim?" Mary asked.

"I hurt. I hurt like hell. Sigurd, I wish I'd let you go."

"I tried to," Sigurd said stiffly.

"Sure you did. Don't mind me. My skull's throbbing like a jack-hammer." He caught a long, shuddery breath. "Anyway, now we know we're stuck in here for a while. We've got a wait, so let's get set for it. About the lights—four flashlights?—that's all we got left, Sigurd? We'll use one at a time"

"And as sparingly as possible," Dr. Carson added.

"Damn it, Sigurd!" Danny Speare protested "As leader of this trip, you should've arranged to handle a situation like this!"

"Blame me," Jim said sharply. "I did the planning." He stifled a groan. "Haven't I got a big enough headache without *you* riding me too?"

"I suppose you consider this thing an act of God!"

"Well, who'd *you* blame for the hot weather? The Chamber of Commerce?"

"Jim! —Danny, please," Mary said.

Captain Sigurd passed out cigarettes. Only Danny Speare's carbide light was burning now, and it faintly. The glowing tips of the cigarettes gave comfort in the dimness.

"Waiting," Jim remarked. "We G.I.'s never got used to it."

"Darkness is a relative thing," Dr. Carson said. "We adjust to it. Our eyes open wider, and strain to see. Our ears listen intently, magnifying every breath of sound. The very nerves of our skin labor tactilely, every hair on our bodies tautens, to perceive by touch. Even our nostrils flare, and our taste buds swell, to suck in sensation—"

"It scares you, at first," Jim cut in mildly. "It happens to everybody, but you get over it pretty darn' quick."

Speare's carbide light expired with a faint, feeble plop.

JIM HEARD MARY CATCH HER BREATH, as if her throat had suddenly locked on her. She sucked convulsively on her cigarette, then, so that it glowed brightly, lighting her frightened face.

Both Carson and Danny Speare flicked on their flashlights.

"Just one at a time," Jim reminded. "Intermittently."

Dr. Carson shut his off. Danny Speare's light seemed a pitiful glimmer in an immense and murmurous night. Jim felt Mary shiver beside him. He knew what she was feeling. Despite his own work in caves, always the first moments in the awful, unrelieved darkness underground brought on that suffocating growth of panic. He could shake it off; experience *did* help. But Mary lacked it. Moreover, all too vivid in her mind, right now, was thought of that body lying back in the cave of inscription. All too vivid in *all* their minds, just now, was realization that this cave might become a crypt to contain them every one.

CHAPTER FOUR

UNEASY quarter-hours passed. The minutes were heavy with strain. Nerves were taking a beating, Jim knew. They'd take a worse beating in the hours, or days, ahead. *Days? It's night down here. One long, unending night.* And Jim realized that if any of their party was prone to claustrophobia, this would bring it on. . . .

"*What's that?*"

Dr. Carson lunged to his feet as he cried out, his cultured voice hoarse with amazement.

"What's what?" Jim asked. "I've heard nothing."

"Nerves, I guess." Carson stammered. "For an instant, it was so clear." He listened tautly a moment. "One imagines things."

He sat down. Jim had flicked on his flashlight, and he left it on a long moment. Mary leaned toward him.

"Let me look at that bandage on your scalp. Looks loose," she said. But as he bent his head and she bent close to meet him, she whispered: "Jim, I'm scared. I'm *scared*. Not about being in here. . . . When you turn the light off, edge toward me." Aloud, she decided: "No, I guess that bandage is holding all right."

Presently he flicked off the light again; and he moved toward her in the darkness. Her groping hand left his shoulder, and she brought her lips close to his ear.

"Jim, this— It's about Danny. Just listen, and don't say anything," she whispered tremulously. "I'd known Danny's wife, Bea, before they ever married. They met at a party I gave. Truth is, Bea was the best friend I had. When she—died, I guess I took it as hard as Danny did. Likely that brought us together. We were both so broken up."

She stopped, as Danny Speare stirred on the other side of her. Jim yawned loudly, lengthily, to cover Mary's movements.

She whispered again: "Jim, the last time I saw Bea, she told me she was considering a divorce. She didn't explain much, just that they liked different things. Danny didn't want children, and he did want to live in Hollywood, and that meant a hectic social life, keeping contacts, and—well, Bea had different ideas. They weren't quarreling at all, though—just—wondering about things.

"I've never thought much about that. Until—a little while ago. Jim!" Her faint whisper grew tense. "I'm wondering if—if I really know Danny at all. This must sound crazy to you. But I've *got* to tell you! Listen, wh-when we found Bea's body, back there in the cave with those rock inscriptions, remember I picked up the leather purse she'd been carrying? Jim, the light wasn't too good from our lamps, but I found writing on that bag! Scratched on, like she'd used the stone in her ring. And Jim, what I read was—'*Dan choked me.*'"

She was silent, then; and presently he realized that she was crying. He put his arm about her trembling shoulders, and she relaxed gratefully against him.

"Do you think I'm crazy?" she whispered. "Do you think I just *imagined* it all?"

"No," he whispered, his words firm with conviction. "What you say fits in with something else. Did Bea turn much of her money over to him?"

"No. Bea was cautious about any large amount of money."

So she hadn't given him much. And when Bea talked of divorce, Danny Speare saw the gravy train pulling away

from him, fast. *So the guy did some planning,* Jim decided grimly. *Likely Bea had no other kin. Danny reasoned that if she died, he'd collect the money. There'd be a delay, maybe; but he could wait. He would wait!*

"Jim!" Mary was whispering again. "Do you think Danny—you think he did it?"

I sure as blazes do! Jim thought. Bea had started out of the cave to get help, after that accident to her cousin. But Danny followed her. Attacked her. Choked her. Didn't shoot her, or use a rock—that maybe would leave signs of murder that could be interpreted even months after. No, he choked her, so that there would be no evidence when a party came in here months later and finally found her moldering body. It was twisted thinking, grisly shrewdness; but that was what it took to plan cold-blooded murder. . . .

He choked her, until he thought her lifeless, and left her lying in some far-off recess of the cave. But she had come to her senses, weak and sick. To find herself in darkness! Maybe she'd had a pack of matches in her purse. Or a used-up flashlight. And she'd tried to crawl down through the long, twisting corridors of the cave; in darkness, when her matches gave out; and she got hopelessly lost.

And there, alone, in pain, she had died. . . .

Instead of answering her question, Jim asked: "You think Danny saw you read the words scratched on the purse, Mary?"

"He's got the purse. He—sort of snatched it from me. I don't know whether he saw me read it or not. Jim, what do you think he'll do?"

"Nothing," Jim whispered back, very firmly. "You're with us. Just relax. Stop talking, now. I'll stay close by you."

"Th-thanks, Jim!"

Something else became clear to Jim, then, as he reflected:

Mary wanted to come on this trip, to find Bea, to settle once and for all that Bea was dead, so Mary and Danny could marry right away. But Danny Speare's conscience made him uneasy. He wanted to come down here without her, and to look for Bea's body himself, and make sure that there was nothing here that would indicate murder. That's why he tried to get me to refuse to take Mary along. None of the rest of us knew about Bea, and—

Mary's hand touched Jim; she was whispering shakily again.

"Jim, now, if—if Danny's stuck down here, with the rest of us, to die in the dark, the way Bea did—it's what he deserves! It's j-just what he deserves!"

Jim grasped her hand, and leaned toward her, intending to reassure her, to bolster her courage.

BUT DR. CARSON'S FLASHLIGHT came on, and Dr. Carson was scrambling to his feet, Dr. Carson was yelling hoarsely, his voice so startled, so electrified, so unbelieving, that the others sat upright, and Jim lurched to his feet.

"There it is again! Am I crazy? Don't any of *you* hear it, too?"

They listened, rigid. Jim heard it, then, and his heart leaped violently. But he fought back a wild surge of hope. It couldn't be true. Just could not. Then once more he heard the sound, and it wasn't merely water hissing and wailing as it flowed.

"Somebody's shouting!" Mary cried.

"Mary, there's nobody else in the cave."

"Somebody's yelling, all right," Captain Sigurd said heavily.

It was a voice. A man's voice. But the words were blurring beyond recognition. The words ran together in a hollow rumbling, Jim realized, because the voice was coming through tortuous passageways and domed galleries, jumbling and reëchoing in a manaic travesty of senseless sound.

He felt himself going, and bawled, "Keep that rope!"

"It can't be coming through the siphon," he reasoned breathlessly. "The water would stop it. Yet it's reaching us. That means there are openings to the outside!"

"Then the siphon isn't the only way out of here!" Mary cried.

"Just what is the sound?" Dr. Carson asked.

"A loudspeaker, from the broadcasting truck," Danny Speare answered. "The sound man has turned his loudspeaker into the cave and tuned it up high!"

"What's he trying to tell us?" Sigurd asked.

"What difference does it make!" Jim said wildly. "Don't you realize? If sound from outside can blast clear

into here, it's coming through some other tunnel than the siphon!"

"Then let's get out of here," Mary begged. "Right now!"

Chapter Five

IT meant an exploring job, with flashlights that had little life in them, Jim realized. However, the blare of that loudspeaker outside would be a guide through the dark labyrinth, a thread of sound to lead them to the surface.

They were gathering up coats and jackets and safety rope.

Danny Speare stepped toward Jim. Danny's hard hat sat at a jaunty angle on his yellow hair. Even in jeans and flannel shirt, Danny Speare had a lithe easiness and a dapper air. The guy had something, Jim thought; his charm wasn't phony.

"Look, Braden," Danny said. "That sound may be filtering through cracks that only a snake could squeeze through!"

"That's sure possible."

"If we leave this room, it'll make rescue tougher."

"*What* rescue?" Captain Sigurd demanded. "Sit here and rot, Speare. The rest of us are making a try to help ourselves!"

Danny Speare started to say something, then checked it. Jim watched him, narrow-eyed. *He knows,* Jim decided, *that Mary read the words Bec scratched on that leather bag. So he's scared.*

They roped together again. Jim put himself at the head of the line this time, with Mary right behind him.

In a cave system, a running stream usually flows on the lowest level. Jim reasoned that there must be passageways above the siphon that doubled back to the outside.

"Let's go," he said tersely, and led the group up onto the balcony at the back of the chamber. They worked along this wide ledge, and listened at the entrance of corridor after corridor leading away from the room. To Jim's consternation, the rumble of sound from the loudspeaker outside seemed equally faint and blurred in each of the tunnels.

"These corridors must all meet," he said. "We'll try this one."

And he led off into a narrow, slanting crack in gray-white marble. It twisted to the west, into the right direction, and Jim became hopeful. Presently they emerged into a broad hall studded with stalactites like long, gleaming teeth.

"Looks like a shark's mouth," he said, and grinned back at Mary.

She managed a smile, but her lips shook. She was tense and profoundly alarmed, he knew; but she was trying her best to be calm.

They wormed their way on. Jim's flashlight was woefully inadequate. Jim felt an odd, oppressive sense of shadowy demons kept precariously at bay by the feeble light, and tensed to spring should the light die.

The pitch of the floor grew steeper, and the roof came low, until they were forced to climb on hands and knees.

"This is good," Jim said. "It means we're on a higher level than the siphon."

And then his flashlight went dark.

"Jim!" It burst from Mary, in fright. Behind her, Dr. Carson flicked on his light, and passed it on to her. She gave it to Jim, whispering: "I'm all right. F-forgive the scream."

The slant of the floor grew steeper, so that they had to crawl, muscling upward. They were soon gasping from exertion.

Jim stopped, so that they could catch their breath.

Mary whispered: "Jim! Can you hear the loudspeaker?"

He listened, and could not. But he lied cheerfully, "Sure. It's dim, because of the slant of the floor."

She said, "Oh," and was still. Again Jim listened intently, but he could not hear that diffused hollow murmur of the loudspeaker outside. Because of the thudding of his heart and the rasp of his breathing, he told himself. And fear began sliding into his brain like ink suffusing water. Their remaining flashlights would last only a brief while longer. And then they would be lost in the caves, in utter darkness, where even a rescue party, if it ever came, might not find them. When exploring caves alone, he had faced risks that concerned him alone; but now he had others to consider. Again he thought of that lonely body in the cave of inscriptions.

What an awful way to die! he brooded.

Groping through darkness, crawling through an endless maze, perhaps physically unhurt, able to last for days, even weeks, straining pitifully for a single ray of light to ease the blackness pressing against your eyeballs. With nothing to tell of minutes passing, of hours gone, of sunrise and sunset. How long do you last? How long does the mind last? Wouldn't it be sensible to creep fumblingly along until you found a deep pit and fling yourself into it, praying that you'd find release in one swift, crashing instant?

He caught a shuddery breath, and raised up again.

"All right! Let's move!"

Presently the floor leveled, and roof rose, so that they could walk upright again. Jim felt a surge of hope.

Then they rounded a bend, and Jim stopped with an involuntary oath of dismay. He hated himself for it, because Mary, right behind him, heard and called out in alarm: "What's wrong?" He did not answer. It was not easy to say, "Everything's wrong. We're at a dead end. Our end."

Right ahead of them, the roof closed down, shutting the tunnel.

Then Jim laughed shakily. For he saw holes in the wall to the left, low down. As he got down on hands and knees and flashed his light into them, he felt like a kid playing a game, only it was a grim, earnest game, with so much at stake.

"Now we crawl through torpedo tubes!" he told the others.

He wormed on through one passage like a gopher-hole, pushing his flashlight ahead of him. He pulled himself upright, then, as he emerged into a large room.

"All right, everybody. Come on through!" he called, in relief.

One by one, the others crawled through, to join him.

And then Mary said again: "Jim! That loudspeaker! I haven't heard it for some time. Have any of you?"

Her voice shook with an alarm that was infectious.

Jim said firmly: "The sound engineer has stopped talking, that's all."

"Or else we're in a blind alley," Dr. Carson murmured.

Sigurd was flashing his light ahead.

"Maybe we are, at that," he said tightly.

HIS FEEBLE LIGHT BEAM SHOWED that the room ended in a blind, blank wall. They stared at it, too stricken to speak.

Then John said: "No! There's an exit. Come on!"

They followed him, hurrying forward. What had looked like a shadow on the floor, at the base of that blank wall, was a sheer drop, the brink of a pit like a bottomless well, a dozen yards across.

"I still say it's a blind alley," Captain Sigurd remarked.

"Maybe we'd better go back, Jim?" Mary suggested.

"That's the only sensible thing to do," Danny Speare said.

Jim shook his head. They had two flashlights left, which were dwindling fast. He didn't tell Mary that.

"Let's study this manhole a bit."

He turned his light-beam into the pit, and they stared down; but they could see only dark walls. The feeble light faded out before touching bottom. Jim dropped a rock into the pit, and counted, "One—two—three—four—" But they never heard the stone strike at all. "It must've hit soft sand, or mud," he said. "We'll just have to rope on down this elevator shaft."

"It's too damned risky!" Danny Speare protested.

"You'd rather just sit here? In the dark?" Jim retorted. "You three men lower me on the rope. I'll have a look down there."

JIM PASSED THE ROPE AROUND a stalagmite as thick as an oak, then made a loop in the end. The others took hold of the line. Jim stepped into the loop, and lay down and swung his feet over the edge of the pit and lowered himself. His flashlight he hooked to his belt. Then he nodded.

"All right, lower away."

Mary said, "Do be careful, Jim!" and he nodded to her.

They paid out the rope jerkily, and he thought of the line fraying against the rock; but there was nothing he could do about that. With one hand he held himself away from the side of the pit as he descended. It was like going down into a deep well, except that he could see no bottom, only the curved face of rock. A dozen yards down, the wall sloped inward, and he could no longer steady himself against it as he was lowered. He began to rotate, to spin one way, then the other. He twisted the flashlight on his belt to throw the beam straight down; but the feeble light still revealed no bottom; and the empty space below made his stomach convulse and an acid bitterness burn into his throat.

Suppose they paid out the entire length of rope, and he still was not on the bottom, but hanging in darkness and space? Would they be able to haul him back up? He wondered, and he had sickening doubt; for they had no pulley, and he weighed a hundred and ninety, so the task might be beyond their strength.

On down, his jerky descent continued and his rotating on the end of the rope grew dizzying. He couldn't stop it, and he couldn't check it. First one way, then the other, with an increasing whip that momentarily drew reeling blackness over his senses. He was utterly helpless against it, and it was an infuriating and frightening thing. If he passed out, he'd lose his hold on the rope and fall.

Then he was touching rock—he was rubbing against the wall; for at this depth the pit slanted, the well bent like a funnel that twisted to one side. He scraped on down it.

His feet jolted against stone. He had landed on a tiny ledge.

"Okay!" he shouted, hoarse with relief. "Stop!"

He turned his flashlight beam down again. Below him, the pit narrowed and bent at a still sharper angle. He could not see its terminus at all.

"Are you on the bottom?" Dr. Carson called, his voice booming in the well.

"No. I'm on a ledge."

"What do we do now?"

Yeah, what? Jim's harried thoughts ached around.

He studied the slope below. It was steep, immediately beneath him, but curved to a gentler pitch as far as he could see past the overhang. But what lay beyond? An increasingly gentle slope onto the floor of a room? Or a straight drop-off that would send him plunging far down onto the rocky bottom of the shaft?

I need the rope, to go on, he realized. But if he had the rope dropped to him, the others would be stranded up above. Without the rope, however, he was stopped where he was, right here. *Suppose I have them all down to this tiny ledge,* he pondered, *and then I use the rope to go lower?* The trouble with that was that the others would be unable to return to the top of the pit, if necessary. There was a heart-stopping alternative to that, too: if the rope was not long enough to reach bottom from here, they would all be marooned on this tiny ledge. *And for keeps!*

The rope was surely long enough to reach bottom, he told himself. He did not believe that the cave system was anywhere deeper than three hundred feet. But he wasn't positive. It was simply a reasoned hunch. And they would have to act on it, he decided.

"All right, come on down," he shouted as confidently as he could. "Double the rope, so we can pull it down to us afterward."

Captain Sigurd called, "Okay. We're coming."

The line was drawn up. And after interminable minutes, he saw someone being lowered. Misgivings stabbed him. This ledge was but a foot broad at its widest and maybe six feet long. Precarious footing for five people!

It wasn't Mary coming down, he saw then, but a man. Danny Speare. Jim helped him in to the ledge. Speare relaxed, sighing.

"It's a nightmare, all right," Jim remarked. "Start driving a piton, will you? Couple of 'em. They'll serve for handholds while the others come down, and also we'll anchor the rope to 'em."

"The others! Man alive, you're not having them come down, too?"

"Yes. Then we'll rope down the rest of the way, to the bottom."

"Are you completely nuts? There's no room on this ledge."

"There has to be."

"Look," Speare insisted, "you and I can rope on down, and get out of the cave and bring back a rescue squad."

"Like hell," Jim snorted. "We don't leave anybody perched up there in the dark."

"*Throw the rope down!*" Danny Speare bawled up the shaft.

"No! Hold it!" Jim shouted. "Damn you, Speare—"

Danny Speare twisted toward him. Speare leaned toward him, and in Speare's hand, gleaming faintly in the beam from Jim's flashlight, was a knife with a five-inch blade that had whipped open at pressure on a button. Danny Speare thrust the blade at Jim, steel biting through jacket and shirt into skin.

"I'm not letting you kill us all," Speare told him, shrill with desperation. "Don't move and don't talk!" And again he yelled to those above, "*Drop the rope down.*"

Even in the blurred swiftness of the next half moment, Jim's mind had time to think, and to realize, and he even felt a flash of admiration for Danny Speare's quick-wittedness. He had moved fast; he had grabbed the first opportunity that had come along. He knew that Mary could expose him as a murderer—unless he prevented her. *Sure, you want to get down and leave the rest of us behind! You'll get out—but you won't bring a rescue squad! You'll head for the border. You'll cross into Mexico. You'll just disappear. And it'll just be assumed that you wandered off and died here in this cave, like the rest of us!*

THERE WAS NO TIME FOR ARGUMENT, and no room for struggle on that ledge. Jim struck with the swiftness of a reflex, bringing his arm down onto Speare's wrist and knocking it aside as he rammed his shoulder into Speare with all the force he could muster in the cramped posture. Steel ripped through Jim's shirt and across his ribs in slashing pain: Danny Speare staggered, and went off-balance, and Jim lurched off-balance as well. Danny Speare cried out, and his left hand caught at the rope as he fell.

For an instant he sustained himself. He dropped the knife, and grabbed for the rope with his other hand. But his feet slipped from the ledge; and his full weight on one

insecure handhold was too much. His scream was a drawn-out cry of terror as he plummeted into the depths of the shaft.

Jim wrenched himself sidewise as he fell, and caught a knee and elbow on the ledge. For a moment he hung there, and then the crumbly rim of the ledge powdered away under his weight, and his knee slipped off, and he felt himself going. He bawled with all his strength, *"Sigurd, keep that rope!"* His sliding body pulled his elbow off the ledge, and he was hanging to it by his hands. But the rotten stone was giving under his desperate fingers. He tried for a better hold, gasping in an agony of effort.

Then he was falling, the rock lacerating his palms, and fright was a thunderous wind in his brain. But he was pressing against the slope, and the slope was curving out under him, and his pace was slackening. For an instant hope bloomed wildly in his mind. And then below him was nothing at all. No wall, no rock, no support. He had slid off the brink of a cliff. He was falling free in the utter blackness, plunging down into an abyss. His throat swelled in an instinctive cry—

He struck—struck with a shock of anguish that almost blacked out his senses. He struck into cold water that closed over his head, water that he gasped chokingly into his lungs. He struggled frantically; he got his feet onto solid rock and scrambled upright, strangling, and flailing his arms. But it was air, not water, that he now sucked into his throat.

He was in chest-deep water that flowed past him with so much current that he could hardly stay on his feet against it. He had no light—but he *saw* light. He saw a small patch of gray blue stippled with white darts, far beyond him.

Realization poured in upon his shocked mind, and with it came soaring jubilation. This was Holcomb Creek. The trail into the cave lay along its bank. And that patch of blue glinting with silver—

That's sky! That's the cave mouth! It's nighttime outside!

"Sigurd!" he shouted up the shaft. "Mary! Dr. Carson! I'm down in the tunnel entrance. I'm beyond the siphon. Come on down. All of you! We're almost out of the cave!"

Chapter Six

JIM blessed Captain Sigurd's rock-climbing skill as Sigurd lowered Mary, then Dr. Carson, to the ledge, then followed them. Sigurd drove pitons into the rock, threaded the rope through them, and lowered Mary and Dr. Carson on down to Jim. He drew them to the shallower side of the stream; and when Sigurd joined them, they started toward the glorious patch of night sky.

"Lord, it's good to really see," Dr. Carson breathed.

Mary laughed unsteadily. She was wet and cold and shivering, light-headed with reaction. They all were, Jim realized as he put his arm about her to help her along.

They started violently, in fright, as a voice boomed into the cave with a blast that scorched their nerves like whirling sandpaper. It was that truck loudspeaker sounding off again: *"Attention, Captain Sigurd! The stream emerging from the cave is rising over its banks. Get out before the way is blocked! . . . This is Mannix, calling Captain Sigurd. The stream—"*

"He's telling us!" Jim shouted.

They laughed. It seemed funny—now! . . .

They were halfway to the cave entrance when Jim stumbled against something in the water, and called out sharply, drawing Mary back.

"Carson! Turn your light this way!"

It was a man's long figure sprawled inert against the bank.

"Who is it?" Carson demanded. "Speare?"

"Yes," Jim said unsteadily. "Danny Speare."

"Is he dead, Jim?" Mary whispered.

"Yes," Jim said, and bent over the body. Carson helped him pull it up out of the water. Finally Jim straightened up.

Briefly he explained what had happened, the struggle on the ledge in the well; and the way Speare, then he, had fallen.

"But we didn't land in the same spot. Speare must've hit in the shallow side of the stream, head-first. His neck's broken."

Soberly Dr. Carson said: "It happened quickly, then. He was lucky."

It was a couple minutes of ten P.M. Mary and Jim sat in the broadcasting truck. The engineer was at the mixing panel, and Dr. Carson stood before the mike, some hurriedly jotted notes on a pad in his hand, ready to make the scheduled ten o'clock report on the cave trip.

Jim said: "Mary, I—I'm not an awfully tactful guy. I've got to know. About Danny. You haven't any reservations or illusions about him left, have you?"

She shook her head, the light dancing softly in her dark hair.

"I haven't any illusions. But my heart's not just an—an album. I can't pull a picture out of it without tearing something."

"Of course not. What I want to say is—I intend to see you often, Mary. Do you mind?"

She smiled, and she said: "I like you a lot, Jim."

The sound-man gave Dr. Carson a signal, and Carson launched into his talk: "This is Neil Carson, reporting on a journey of exploration through a remarkable system of caverns. Friends—"

He talked fluently and well, and John and Mary listened a while. Presently Mary sighed, and leaned against Jim.

She whispered: "I'm impatient for morning. I'm so *tired* of darkness. Just knowing that I'll see the sun, and feel it warming into me, is like a promise of something fine."

He nodded, soberly. "That promise of something fine, tomorrow—that's what keeps us going, I guess. That's what keeps us working, and trying, and *hoping*."

Coming!

"The Quest," *by William Brandon*

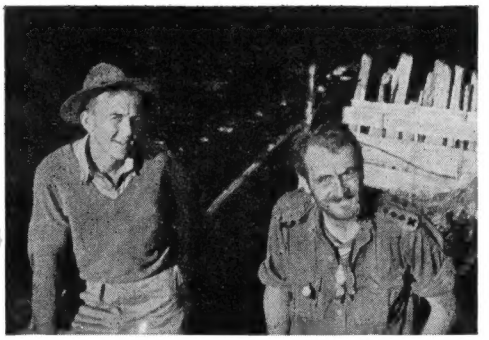
The facial surgeons did a good job, but because he'd been wearing another man's dog-tags, they worked from the wrong photographs.

"The Sergeant, the Sikh and the Holy Man"—a complete novel *by John and Ward Hawkins*

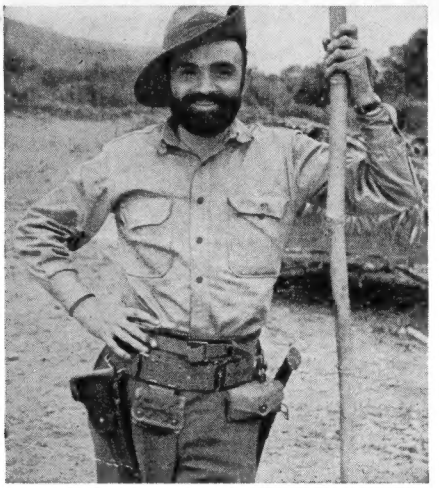
A transmigration adventure, by Bertram Atkey; a Snake River Jim story by Wilbur Peacock, and many others by H. Bedford-Jones, Joel Reeve and Raymond Spears, as well as several newly "arrived" writers.

The BURMA MISSION

Some of the fighting men whose exploits are described in the stirring story of OSS adventure which begins on page 74.



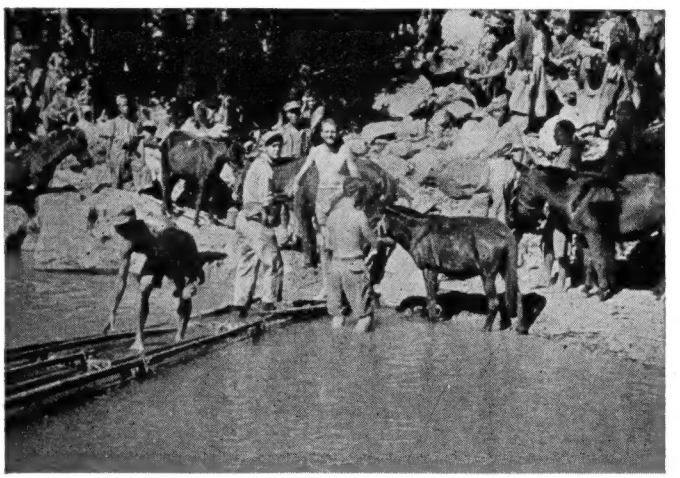
Capt. Lazarsky and Capt. Simon Reed



Father James Stuart

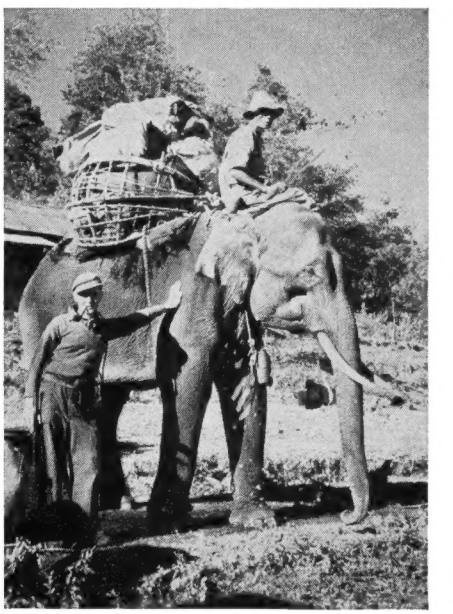
Major Joost and Lazum Tang

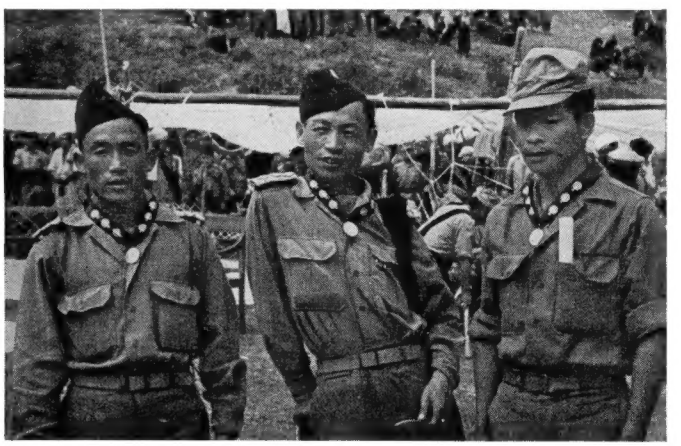
Captain Hiram Pamplin



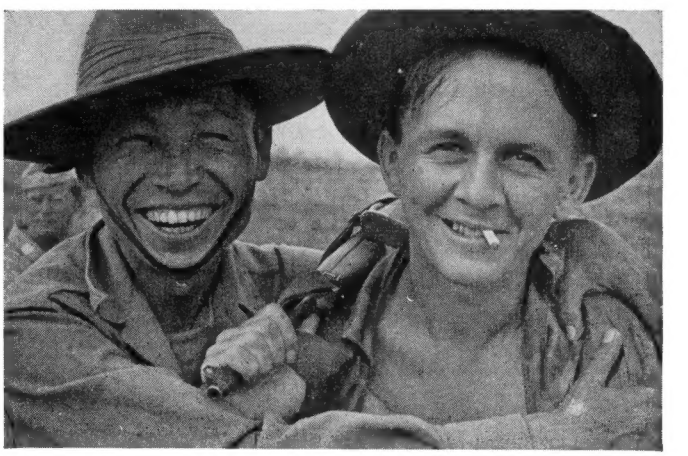
At right: Captured Japanese work elephant.

At left: O.S.S. Kachin party crossing Shweli River.





Major Lazum Tang in center with two of his subadars



Major Lazum Tang and Captain Lazarsky

BLUE BOOK

Magazine of Adventure for MEN, by MEN ★ JUNE, 1947

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TWELVE SHORT STORIES, INCLUDING:

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